

# AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH MOSCONI

Interviewee: Joseph P. Mosconi

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Interviewer: William A. Douglass

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## Description

Jack-of-all-trades and master of most, Joe Mosconi, who was born in 1899, has been a rancher, dairyman, truck gardener, field hand, buckaroo, laborer, fireman, first aid instructor, construction foreman, logger, timber contractor, ice delivery man and caretaker. For more than three quarters of a century he has also been an acute observer and inveterate raconteur of life in northern Nevada.

As the elder statesman of Verdi, Joe regales his many visitors with a wealth of stories about his own experiences and those of others, imbued with a sense of wonderment at the enormity of the changes that have transpired during his lifetime. Whether extolling the virtues of Indian tea, recounting how he acquired his house for ten dollars, commenting on current events or showing off an unusual tool from the treasure trove in his basement (which is rather like a well-stocked turn-of-the-last-century hardware store), Joe enthralls his listener. The real challenge is to capture his time rather than his attention as he dances from his duties as chief of Verdi's volunteer fire department, to his caretaker's job at Donner Trail Ranch, to solitary trips in his vintage military jeep to his beloved Sierra Nevada mountains.

It is scarcely hyperbolic to say that from about 1880 to 1914 Italians (mainly North Italians) were important architects of the economy of western Nevada and the adjacent Sierra Nevada. In their capacities as railroadmen, timber contractors, icemakers, canal dredgers, truck gardeners, dairymen and merchants, the Italian population penetrated Nevada's fabric more deeply and with greater staying power than did the shafts of the Comstock and the Tonopah-Goldfield mining districts with their boom and bust cycles.

In many respects Joe Mosconi's life and those of his fellow Italians mentioned in this work help to flesh out the magnitude of the Italian contribution to western Nevada and eastern California society. However, it would be wrong to infer that Joe is self-consciously ethnic Italian. Indeed his "Italianness" would, in his own mind, rank well behind his claim to be a "Verdian," "Nevadan," or "westerner." In this regard he is like the majority of western Nevada's Italians today.



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An Oral History Conducted by William A. Douglass

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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## PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber  
Director, UNOHP  
July 2012

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## ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as

possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable.

When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

The University of Nevada  
Oral History Program  
Mailstop 0324  
University of Nevada, Reno 89557  
(775) 784-6932

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## INTRODUCTION

Jack-of-all-trades and master of most, Joe Mosconi has been a rancher, dairyman, truck gardener, field hand, buckaroo, laborer, fireman, first aid instructor, construction foreman, logger, timber contractor, ice deliveryman and caretaker. For more than three quarters of a century he has also been an acute observer and inveterate raconteur of life in northern Nevada.

As the elder statesman of Verdi, Joe regales his many visitors with a wealth of stories about his own experiences and those of others, imbued with a sense of wonderment at the enormity of the changes that have transpired within his lifetime. Whether extolling the virtues of Indian tea, recounting how he acquired his house for ten dollars, commenting on current events or showing off an unusual tool from the treasure trove in his basement (which is rather like a well-stocked turn-of-the-last-century hardware store) Joe entralls his listener. The real challenge is to capture his time rather than his attention as he dances from his duties as chief of Verdi's volunteer fire department, to his caretaker's

job at Donner Trail Ranch, to solitary trips in his vintage military jeep to his beloved Sierra Nevada mountains. Patience is, however, well-rewarded for to sit at Joe's knee is more than to hear about early Nevada, but rather to experience its presence. Joe Mosconi is not only knowledgeable about Nevada, he is Nevada.

In the following account there is a bias which must be made explicit from the outset and which is more a function of my questions than Joe's answers. I have an abiding interest in the subject of Italian emigration, and part of my reason for interviewing Joe was to glean information about one of the most significant, yet least understood, ethnic groups in western Nevada. It is scarcely hyperbolic to say that from about 1880 to 1914 Italians (mainly North Italians) were important architects of the economy of western Nevada and the adjacent Sierra Nevada. In their capacities as railroadmen, timber contractors, icemakers, canal dredgers, truck gardeners, dairymen and merchants the Italian population penetrated Nevada's fabric more deeply and with greater

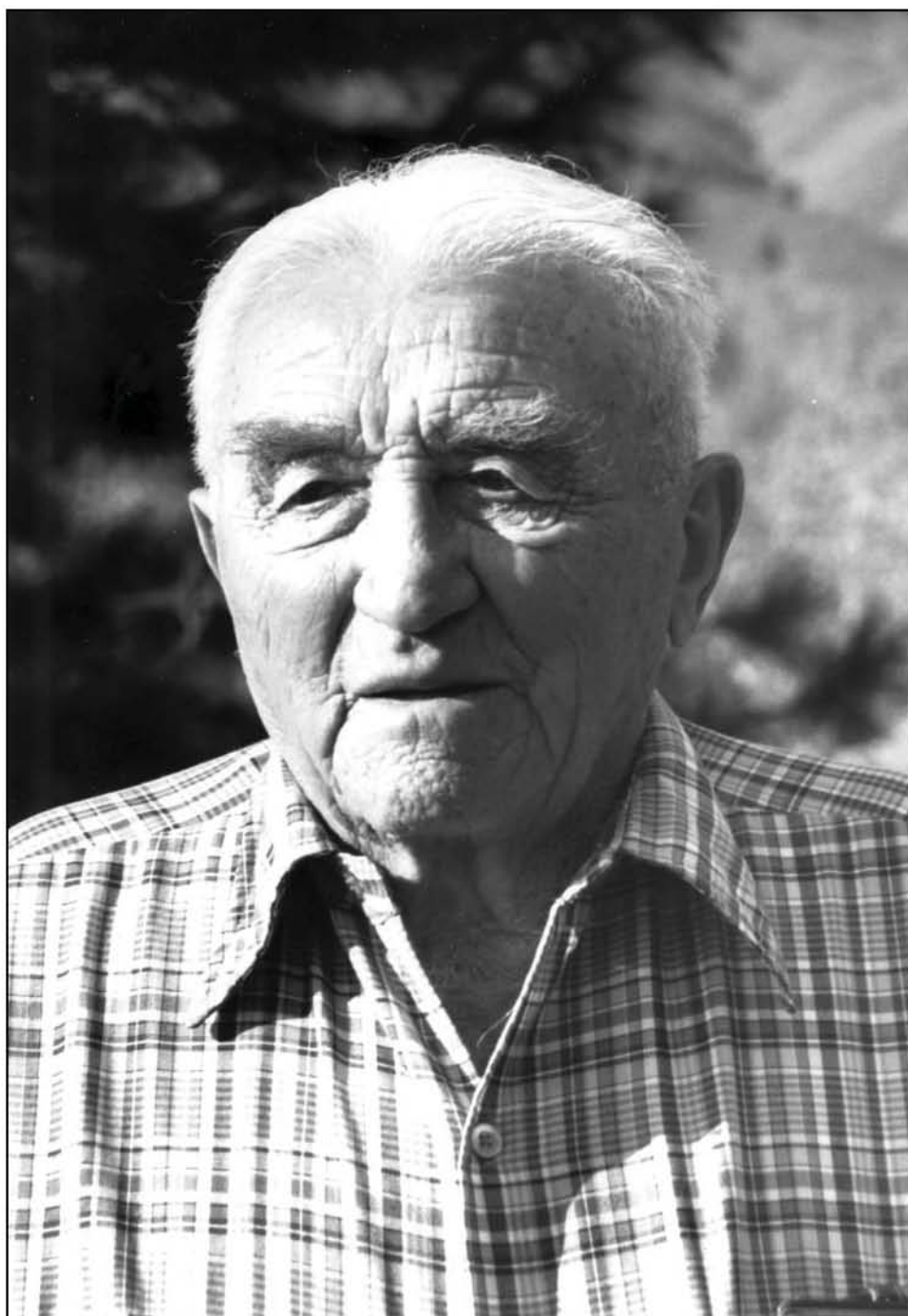
staying power than did the shafts of the Comstock and the Tonopah-Goldfield mining districts with their boom to bust cycles.

In many respects Joe Mosconi's life and those of his fellow Italians mentioned in this work help to flesh out the magnitude of the Italian contribution to western Nevada and eastern California society. However, it would be wrong to infer that Joe is self-consciously ethnic Italian. Indeed his "Italianness" would, in his own mind, rank well behind his claim to be a "Verdian," "Nevadan," or "westerner." In this regard he is like the majority of western Nevada's Italians today.

William A. Douglass  
June, 1985

#### **NOTE**

It is the practice of the Oral History Program to verify the spelling of proper nouns whenever possible, either through research or with the assistance of the chronicler. In the case of the Mosconi transcript such verification was occasionally impossible. Phonetic representation has been employed when the actual spelling could not be determined, and these words have been marked by an asterisk throughout the text.



JOSEPH MOSCONI  
1985





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## AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH MOSCONI

*William A. Douglass: When you got here to this country, you were up there around Truckee first, right?*

Joseph Mosconi: Yes.

*Your dad was living with your uncle, Jim, and your family stayed right there at that Nevada Bar?*

Yes. Nevada Hotel. That's what he called it.

*Which was a boardinghouse. Were there a lot of other northern Italian fellows there at the boardinghouse at this time?*

Yes. My uncle, of course, lived there.

*Was Jim the first of your family to come to America?*

Yes.

*Did he come here because he had relatives here before, or do you know how he got here?*

No. There was a young man, Capetti, come from northern Italy and landed in Truckee. That's the story that was told to me. A young man. He's buried up there. He was not afraid of nothing, and he traveled the world. Anyway, he landed up in Truckee; he came over here in the 1870s or 1880s. I forget now. It reminded him so much of the town where he was born, and then he'd write over there, and then he got to sending money over there to them for their fare to come over here. So then one would come over here...

*What was he doing in Truckee? What kind of a job did he have?*

I think he was a stonemason.

*He was sending back to Italy to help people come over?*

Yes.

*Was he from Grosio?*

He's from Grosio.

*Was he the first Italian from Grosio to come to Truckee?*

Well, as much as I can remember, yes. Then there was a fellow by the name of Steve Besio. A very brilliant man, Mr. Besio was. At every funeral he could give a eulogy. One of his sons—he's retired now—was the head of the public schools of Manteca [California], the other side of Stockton. And he has one son..they have a dry goods store up at Truckee.

Then my uncle Joe came over, and there was Capetti [and] Borsi, from the town where I was born—Grosio—and Delfatti. Delfatti was from the town right below, like down here at River Inn—larger than Grosio. Then there was Maffi; some of the Maffis are here—Benny. You ought to talk to him. Boy, he could tell you plenty.

*I'm going to try to, yes.*

He was born over there.

*He was from Grosio, too?*

Well, I think he was born at the foot of that hill over there from the town of Grosio. There's a lot of little towns a stone's throw from one to the other. And then who else? Pini. They were all over here from Grosio, I thought.

*So Jim came over that way?*

Yes.

*Did this fellow in Truckee send him his money to come over?*

Well, that I don't know.

*Do you know when Jim came?*

No, I don't. He was here when John Cabona.... Now, I don't know whether Cabona's from my home town or not. I don't think so. I think he was from northern Italy.

*OK. Jim came to Truckee, then, and what was he working at in Truckee?*

He and my uncle Joe were stonemasons, and they done a lot of stonework up there. My uncle Jim would get these contracts from different people—McGlashan, oh, the elite people of the community. [Charles F.] McGlashan was a very recognized person, and he had a big dome rock up there. He had a stairway built out of granite all the way up.

Then they worked for the paper mill in Floriston. You see, there was a large paper mill in Floriston. They used to cut wood; that's how the paper was made—out of wood.

*They'd cut wood for that mill?*

For that mill.

*Back up in the hills above Floriston?*

Up in the mountains, yes. They were all over these mountains up here in back of Truckee and, well, everywhere.

*Jim, then, brought over Joe, or he brought over your dad?*

I'm not sure how my uncle Joe...I think that's how he came over here—by Uncle Jim. Uncle Jim was one of the smartest of the brothers; he had a saloon in the hotel. He didn't like to work; he let the other guys work. He had what they called the Nevada Saloon in Truckee.

*By himself, or did he have a partner?*

No, by himself. It was on the corner of River Street and the street that comes over to the shortcut to Meeks Bay, on that side. That side was the Nevada Saloon, and this side is Besio's building. He had an eating house and a bar.

*A rooming house and all that?*

That building is still there. It's a big, 2-storey stone building. Next to him was the man that used to haul the mail to Tahoe City when it snowed.

*Was Jim married at that time?*

Yes.

*And where was his wife?*

His wife came over from Grosio. They never had no children.

*Was he married before he came over, or did she come over here and marry him, or did he go back to Italy and get married?*

No, he was married over there. He sent for her. He was married over there; I'm pretty sure. She was a great big woman.

*So, your uncle Jim had that hotel when you first came to Truckee. How long did he have that hotel?*

I don't remember, but quite a few years. Then all the men that worked in the sawmills and different...in the wintertime they weren't working, why, they stayed at his hotel. Room and board for \$25 a month. Some of them couldn't pay it because they didn't have any

money, so when they went to work, why, they'd pay him. They were trusted people.

*You said your uncle Jim lived at his Nevada Hotel. Were there any other married families in that hotel?*

Just my dad and uncle. Way years later, there was.. I can't think of her name. She was kind of a housemaid, and then she married, and she stayed there for a while. But then they moved from there to Beckwourth. I think some of her family are still there at Beckwourth.

*Was she from north Italy, too?*

Yes.

*Same town, Grosio?*

Well, that I can't tell you. There's a lot of things that went on that I....

*Well, you were a little boy.*

I was small and young and that.

*So your dad was right there, and he was working as a stonemason on McGlashan's house?*

McGlashan's house. They had a round, great big high rock; it sat up on this hill. I don't know how the rock got there, but it was an enormous rock. I'd say it was, oh, 10 foot through. I think it's still sitting up there. And he built that. He had the stone stairway from down at the Truckee street level all the way up to this rock. There's a history and pictures of it. He enclosed it up on top with a structure of some kind, I think mostly glass. And he had a butterfly collection that is still intact; there's a lot of history to it.

McClashan...,well, they call him the king or the mayor of the community. Officially, I don't think he was, but he was a man that settled all disputes and everything else.

*So, you spent that first year in Truckee. That would've been what year?*

Nineteen hundred and five. It was 24 December 1904 when we landed in New York. Ellis Island.

*And from there you came on the train across the country?*

With the train, and we arrived in Truckee...I believe it was New Year's Day, 1905. Took us 4 or 5 days. Does it take that long now? I guess so, by the train.

*Pretty close. Maybe a little faster. And there was just you, your brother, your sister and your mother?*

That's right.

*And you were the oldest?*

I am the oldest.

*You were about 5?*

Yes. When we got off the train in Truckee, New Year's Day in 1905...a fellow by the name of Dan Sala, too—great big 7-footer. The whole family was that way over in Italy. Their sister was big. I don't know.. .anyway, they [were] big, tall people. Dan and Bert Sala. Bert Sala, the oldest, carried me on his shoulder through a tunnel of snow over to my uncle's Nevada Hotel. The streets, the buildings were all covered. I remember that we'd go in here, and go up the second storey,

and then we had to go up to play on the top of the snow.

*There was really a lot of snow, then?*

There's pictures to prove it! You've probably seen some of them. And we've been in the dry cycle. Look out!

*It's going to get wet?*

It's going to happen again.

*Yes. So when your dad was working on McGlashan's house, that wasn't the first time he was in Truckee? That was after he went down to Angels Camp [California]?*

No, because we went to Angels Camp in 1905. We went down there when I was 6 years old, somewhere in 1905. My father, in the winter of 1905, was over at Glenbrook, Lake Tahoe, Nevada. He and several men were over there cutting wood.

There was a railroad to Tahoe City...I don't think it was a city then. I think it was just a few buildings, 2 or 3 buildings there, that I can remember. The weather...the snowstorm, why, that was the end of the railroad that winter.

So a man by the name of Mr. Finnigan—quite an elderly man, to me; he was up in his 50s or 60s—had a stable down close to the river. [It was] just to the east of the road—the shortcut that goes across the river and then goes to Squaw Valley. He had a home there, and he had a barn there, and he had his horses. He had a contract to deliver the mail up there once a week. I don't know how it got started, but I rode with Mr. Finnigan; he had a little bit of a sleigh, because there was a lot of snow, all those big drifts of snow. And he had 2 white horses— nice team, both exactly alike and about the same size. He took me and my

dog, Prince, along. I'm not sure whether the horses had snowshoes on or not.

*You took the mail from where to where?*

From there, we took the mail from Truckee to Tahoe City. Took us the best part of 2 days to get there. The first day we got to the halfway house. The horses only walked; that's all they done. And that little bit of a sleigh; I think it was a one-horse light sleigh. I forget what time we got there, but it's about 7 or 8 miles. And the horses walking, it takes us 2, 3 hours or better.

The halfway house was past Big Chief, on the road to Tahoe City. Then there's Squaw Creek, coming out of Squaw Valley. This building was there. It was a good-sized building—the barn and the living quarters; it was all one building. I know when we got there we went down into the barn, unharnessed the horses, and he went in and built the fire. They had wood and all the provisions, and they had several places where people could sleep. In other words, it was built for that purpose. So then we fed the horses, and then he cooked something for both of us—I don't remember just exactly what it was.

Then the next morning, why, we got up and we washed the dishes. Had breakfast. Well, first we went out and fed the horses. Just opened the door and there was the barn. So we had our breakfast, and then we harnessed the horses. After we were all ready, why, we cleaned up all the dishes and everything, and then we started out again. I don't know how long it took us, but when we got to Tahoe City, the man was there with this boat, and this boat went chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk. It was what we call a one-lunger; it'd be one cylinder. I don't know what day it was, but he knew, I guess, that was the day that Mr. Finnigan was supposed to be there.

Now, mail...I don't ever remember seeing a bag or anything, but they probably had 4 or 5 letters and some provisions, I suppose, because there was nobody living up there. Very few people living at the lake.

*Did your dad stay at the lake that winter?*

Oh, yes. I don't know how long he stayed there.

*But he stayed up there cutting wood at Glenbrook that first year?*

Yes.

*Were there other Italian fellows with him?*

Oh, yes. There were several men there, cutting wood. I think they were getting \$1.50 a cord.

*What'd they use that wood for?*

Well, they were cutting it for somebody. Now, whether they hauled that wood to Carson City or where...or probably it was wood that they sold. But I remember the time when the locomotives used to use wood.

*Right. That mail trip then...after you got there you gave the mail to the guy on the boat, and he took the mail away?*

He and I got on the boat.

*Oh, you went on the boat, too?*

Oh, yes. Me and the dog. And we went chuk-chuk-chukchuk, and I think we stopped once or twice before we got to Glenbrook. We stopped at Carnelian Bay, I think. There was nobody on the lake; there was very few

buildings. Then we stopped at.. is there a Skunk Harbor, something?

*There could be; I don't know.*

Something. Then at Glenbrook. He let me off at Glenbrook and he went on, and I stayed there.

*With your father?*

Yes.

*How long did you stay there?*

Until he came around the next week. You know, once a week. The next week, then I got on the boat, and we went around the other way.

*Was your mother up there, too, with your father?*

No.

*Where was she staying?*

She was staying in Truckee.

*There at the hotel?*

No. We had a house across the river from there.

*That was the very first year you were here, before you went to Angels Camp?*

That's right. Well, when I went to Angels Camp, I was old enough to go to school. That's where I first attended.

*But you weren't old enough to go to school when you went to Glenbrook that winter?*

No. I wasn't 6 years old until April 1905.

*OK. So you spent the week there with your father, and then you came back and headed the other way around?*

Yes. Got on the boat, and away it went, chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk.[laughter] And we stopped at that one place way over there. There was one building there and then the "Hello there!" So they'd talk a little while, and then I think we stopped at Meeks Bay. And that's about all. I think he only stopped in about 3 or 4 places.

*And then you went back to Mr. Finnigan and went back down the...?*

I don't remember coming back. I came back; I know I did, because I rode the other way, but I don't....

*You made that trip once?*

Just once.

*Well, that's an important story, a nice story. But then that summer, your father decided to go down to Angels Camp?*

Angels Camp.

*He only stayed in Glenbrook for the winter, and right after Glenbrook he went down to Angels Camp?*

I'm pretty sure we went right down to Angels Camp.

*Why did he go to Angels Camp and not somewhere else?*

There was quite a few Italians there. And there was people from our country.



*From Grosio or from around Grosio?*

Yes, but I can't tell you their names or anything. I know that they worked in the mines.

*And your dad went to work in the mines, too?*

He worked in the mines.

*You don't happen to know what he made, working in the mines there, do you? Do you remember what they paid him?*

I remember him talking about there was people working on the ranches, arid they were getting 50¢ a day and board. Now, I don't remember how much my father was making in the mines. He wasn't making very much. It was the Cross Shaft mine. I always remember that name. Then there was another mine, American mine

*What was your dad's name?*

Bartolo. We called him Bert.

*What was his job in the mines?*

Well, he [worked] the drilling machine.

See, there was a lot of gold in that country. When it rained—there was no pavement those days; it was all wagon ruts—where the water.... Used to pick up gold, strings of gold. Nuggets. Everybody was out! All the children and everybody was out there going up and down these ruts, because the water would wash [the gold into the ruts].

*Do you remember where you lived in Angels Camp? What kind of a place you had there?*

Well, we had a place that was this way from Angels Camp, kind of up on the hill.

There was quite a few homes there. Didn't belong to us—was just rented. We had a big kind of a hall-like building on the same piece of property, and I know that people used to go there and meet. I don't know what it was all about. It was kind of a meeting hall. It happened to be on the property where we lived. We didn't own it; pretty sure we didn't.

*That was the first place you went to school—Angels Camp?*

Angels Camp.

*Did you have any trouble in school? You probably didn't know very much English; you hadn't been in America very long. You must've spoken Italian with your family, right?*

Yes. I never had no trouble. I went to school with a Les Schoen. He's still alive. He's the man that owns the Last Chance up here in Verdi. In fact I was a pallbearer when his wife passed away; he called me. Les Schoen and I were in the same class.

*But you didn't have any trouble with the schoolwork because of the English?*

No.

*And you could understand enough English by then?*

I guess so.

*Of course, you'd been here for a little while by then.*

Yes. I got along pretty good. I never had no trouble, and they used to say, "Gee, you speak English pretty clearly." Even right now

I guess I've had that told to me here not too many years ago—that I speak it very freely.

*Yes, you do. You certainly have no accent, but then you came very young, too.*

Yes, I came here young.

*What about your dad? How do you remember his English being?*

Oh, he had good English.

*Right when you first came or was that later?*

Well, he could also speak French, because the stonemasons over there went to Switzerland, and Switzerland is made up of Italy and France and Austria. Isn't it Austria or Germany?

*I think both.*

And he could speak French very fluently.

*So he had a feel for language, then. Did he go to school here at all?*

No. He learned it. He could talk it better than my 2 uncles. Just a gift, I guess to him.

*What about your mother?*

My mother never could speak too well, English. My mother had more schooling than my father, because I could tell on the correspondence back and forth. But she was a homebody.

*She didn't get out that much?*

No. She would never go anyplace. I took her to the show, to the theater, just a few times. She enjoyed it, but she wasn't one of those....

*She didn't want to go around...?*

She was a home...that was her life.

*Yes. What about at home? Would you speak Italian at home? Was that the language that the family used? Or did you use English and Italian?*

We spoke Italian to Papa and Mama, and us brothers and sisters would say. ..there was 2 languages spoke there.

*Yes. Back and forth, just changing all the time?*

Yes. Say I was talking to my mother in Italian, and one of my brothers or sisters would say something, and I'd answer in American. Oh, that went on all over here, everywhere.

*Yes. [laughter]*

Sometimes there was one or 2 families that the father demanded that they speak Italian when they were in the home. Which I thought was wrong, myself. But you know how some people are. But most of them spoke both languages. The children spoke American, and when they spoke with the mother and father, why, it was Italian.

Of course, we had dialects there, too. I remember [people who] lived some 2 miles apart...like Benny Maffi and Joe Maffi here in Reno; they were just maybe from here to Mogul.

*And still they spoke differently from you?*

And they had a different....

*[laughter] Around Reno were there any Veneti?*

Venesiano? Yes, there was. The ranchers in Truckee Meadows were very much from Genoa.



*Capurro and all those?*

Capurros, they were all Genovesi. Avansino.

*I went to Manogue High School here and St. Thomas Aquinas with Avansinos and Benettis.*

Now, the Benettis, they're from Tuscany, Toscani.

*Yes, from Luca...Lucchesi.*

Yes. See, there was Lombardi...especially in the mountains. Then the ranchers were from Genoa, from Genovesi. And the Benettis, they were mostly barbers or hotel-restaurant people from Tuscany. They were more high class; they didn't want to go up....

*They didn't want to be up in the mountains?*

No, they had bars and hotels and restaurants and...well, that's what a Toscano was.

*There's the [Old] Toscano Hotel in Reno. Do you know who started that? It must've been a Toscano, with a name like that. [laughter]*

Yes. The other one, the Colombo, was Phil Curti. Now, Curti...where did he come from, what part of Italy? Northern Italy, but I'm not sure whether it's the Piedmont side.

*Maybe Genovese. With a name like Colombo, you're thinking of Cristoforo Colombo or something. The Genovesi are very proud of that.*

Right. But, anyway, most of the people here in the Truckee Meadows and these mountains were northern Italy, say, from Genoa on up north. Of course, then you had

the barbers here. Wait a minute...Dormio. The Dormio Hotel in Reno. The Dormio family were southern.

*Were they Sicilian?*

There's some more that were southern Italian. Not very many.

*What about Rocco Spina?*

He's from Genoa. His wife died here just not too long ago.

*Wasn't he a shoemaker in Reno?*

Yes, that's right. His son lost his wife. She was a Questa, and a Questa comes from Genoa. And then this Spina comes from Genoa. And then this Spina that lost his wife, his father was a shoemaker. They had a shoe repair factory.

*What about Quilici?*

They're from Tuscany. There's a family out here yet. There's quite a few Toscano in Yerington.

*Let's go back then to Angels Camp. When you were in Angels Camp they had the earthquake in San Francisco?*

That was in 1906. About the only thing that I remember is that family after family after family came to Angels Camp, and us people gave them food and places to sleep.

*Do you remember people staying with you and your family?*

I don't remember. But I know there'd be 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 people together—children,

small—and my mother would give them food, and they probably stayed in that big hall. That I can't remember. But the whole town was just with lots of people that came in from the earthquake.

*How long did you stay at Angels Camp altogether?*

I don't exactly remember. We left in the early part of 1907, sometime. I had a sister born there in 1907, in February, and I think we left right after that and moved back to Truckee.

*Back to your uncle Jim?*

Yes. We moved back there, and I think we moved over in the little house over on the other side of the river again. I remember that.

*Your mother didn't work, though? She stayed at home all the time?*

She stayed home all the time. And then we went up to Euer Valley and was making the charcoal. Uncle Jim was the head promoter.

*He was like a contractor or something?*

Contractor. He'd arrange all of those [stonework] things. Also, he was the one that started this charcoal up in Euer Valley. And my uncle Joe worked up there, too.

It was named after the Euer family; they had a dairy up there. All over, wherever there was meadows in the summertime, there would be a dairy here and a dairy there...all over these mountains.

*People would go up and just milk the cows?*

They'd bring the cows up—either by railroad or some of them walked them even

from Marysville. From way down in there, sometimes they'd walk the cows for 4 or 5 days or more.

In Squaw Valley was a big dairy, and Incline Meadows was a big dairy. Meadow after meadow. Sardine Valley. Hope Valley, up here.

*You mean they'd milk the cows?*

They'd bring the cows up there; there was barns, there was homes there. And they'd milk by hand. They had a hand separator because there was no electricity up there.

This high altitude feed—grass—has more protein in it than the lower, and they would get more cream per gallon from their cow, see. They'd separate this cream on the 10-gallon can. All right. Then that was full, then they'd haul it to Truckee, and then they'd ship it to the Crystal Creamery in Sacramento. The Crystal Creamery is still there, I think.

*And they'd make butter out of it?*

They'd make butter. Sure, the cream would get sour, but that makes good butter. We even shipped it from the ranches ourselves there. Even here. We had the cows. We *did* sell some milk. One time over here at the Donner Trail ranch we sold some milk to a certain dairy that delivered it in Reno. But most of the other ranchers who had the cows...that's all we done with the milk. We separated it and then we'd feed the skim milk to the pigs. And here we have this 10-gallon can and we're pouring-cream in there and when it was full, we'd take it to Reno. Had a ticket on it. It was printed right on [the can]... crystal Creamery, and on the other side there was Mosconi, so-and-so-and-so address.

*And off she'd go? Have to send that on the railroad?*

On the railroad. Then they'd test it, and they'd send you the slip of what your cream tested. They'd pay you so much for the test.

*So your father moved up and was doing that in Euer Valley?*

We moved just for the summer.

*To go up there and be in the dairy?*

No, we didn't have no dairy. We went up there to cut wood and make charcoal. Shipped it in boxcars full of charcoal...I think for the railroad company; I don't know who to.

*And your dad was part of a group of men, or just himself?*

He and my uncle Jim. He was more like the brains of the outfit.

*Do you remember how many guys worked on it?*

We had wood choppers and teamsters that hauled in the wood. My mother done the cooking. When we had the Donner fire, I went up there and half of a log cabin was still there. You know the Donner fire in the 1960s?

Yes.

Well, anyway, I'd say there was 10 men.

*Do you remember what they made? Were they all Italian men that your dad and your uncle knew from north Italy?*

Most of them all from same part of the country where I was born. They'd cut the wood 4 foot long. Then they'd split it... regular cord wood. They had 2 teams—about

8 horses, something like that—and a wagon, and they'd load this wood on these wagons. The bed of the wagon was made so you could put the wood in from the side. A cord of wood is 4 by 4 by 8. They'd haul maybe 2 cords of wood at a time. See, if it'd get too high to throw up, why, they'd just take off.

They had this place where they made like a beehive. Same thing.. cone like. They had to be with nice, smooth, pure dirt, loam—no rocks or anything—and on a nice flat place. Then they'd start in. They'd leave a hole about 2 foot through all the way around and in front, all filled in with flammable material. Then they start putting these sticks of wood, 4-foot wood, all the way around. They made it round, and they keep going and keep going. I don't know how far up they'd go, probably 8, 12, maybe 20 feet or so. Four, 5 of those, end to end, and all the way around, still leaving this hole in here.

They limbed all those trees and branched them, and they'd take the branches and they'd haul all those down there, too, and they'd put them one on top of the other to make a seal. They didn't have no machine; it was all done by hand, with a shovel. There'd be one here, one over there, and one over there, and they'd start throwing this dirt—this loam—and they kept doing it and kept doing it and kept doing it, and that's why they could only go so high, understand, because they had to throw the dirt. It was all done by hand, mind you. All right. I don't know how thick they would put it on there, just so the blaze couldn't come through. See, there was no vent.

[There] was a Mr. Stefani. He was Professor Gottardi's uncle. There was a John Gottardi, retired. I know him very well personally. I think he's younger than I. I know his sister. Pete is dead, the older brother. Then there's another one; I think there's 2 brothers. One of them was the professor up at the university; he taught language, I think.

*Right. I knew him.*

All right. His uncle lived there. They made a little cabin for him to stay right there. He had this kind of a flat ladder, and he'd climb this ladder, and he had to haul this big bucket of coals, I think it was. He'd go up there.. .and I'll never forget. [laughter] He'd kneel down there, and he'd always name himself, bless himself. Sign of the cross. He said something up there—I don't know what it was—then he'd dump this bucket of coals down in there. And he stayed there and watched that so it wouldn't break through. And if it sometimes broke through, he was right away there, because all that fire down in there, that's how you make coal. It takes the moisture out of the wood.

*Oh, yes. It leaves everything else. How long would it take?*

That I can't tell you. Then, when it was done, they'd shovel everything off. Then they'd get it in great big sacks. They had great big scoop shovels, I think, or scoop forks, and they'd fill these sacks, and then they'd make a big high load on this wagon.

*Now, when you were back up there in Euer Valley that summer, you said there were dairies in there, and people came up and kept their cows. Were the people that had their cows up there Italians, primarily?*

Yes. There was Italians. All of Sierra Valley was mostly Swiss-Italian.

*Yes, I've heard that.*

Lot of Italians and Swiss-Italians. That's all they had was dairies. They milked, and that was their livelihood. They never sold milk;

they separated. They shipped all the cream to the Crystal Creamery in Sacramento.

*So a lot of cream went down of f these mountains?*

Oh, yes. Euer Valley and Carpenter Valley...all those valleys. Around Lake Tahoe was the same thing.

*All those little valleys up there?*

There're several meadows, like up at.. .what do you call that creek? There was a sawmill in there afterwards.

*Martis, maybe?*

Martis Creek, yes. Then there was...Squaw Creek? No, it's another. The road that goes down to the other side of the summit, down into Hell Hole country. You've heard of Hell Hole?

*Yes. You're not talking about the Yuba [River]?*

Well, it'd be on the north fork of the start of the American River, I think. Yes.

*Back up there in all those valleys, what about sheep? Did there used to be sheep?*

Oh, yes. Then there was places where the sheep never went in the meadows. The sheepmen and the cattlemen, they didn't get along too well. And the sheep very seldom went into any meadows. Of course, if they were small meadows that there wasn't enough there to keep a string of cows, why, then the sheepmen.... But the sheep used to travel from out in the desert here in Nevada, and there was a lot of sheep that used to come over through that way and cross right here in Verdi

and go up through all the mountains above Dog Valley. Even in Dog Valley the sheep never were right in the valley; they were all up in the high country.

*The dairies were in the valley?*

The dairies were in the valley, yes.

*Were there any Italians who had sheep?*

No, they were mostly all Basque people. Urrutia and [the] Sario family. I knew one of the Sario boys. He even had logging trucks.

*None of the Italian men got into that?*

No, not that I know of. Pretty near all Spanish or Basque people.

*What about gardening, like vegetable gardening and orchards and whatnot to sell to Reno? Were there any Italians doing that around here?*

Yes, quite a bit. I hauled a wagon load [of vegetables] with 2 horses, me and my brother, George, to the Davis mill which was in Sardine Valley. Before that we hauled a load up to the logging camps. Used to be logging camps all over these mountains. They had to stay there all summer because they didn't have no method of transportation like we have today. They had places for the people to sleep, and they had a big kitchen, and they stayed there all during the logging season. We hauled a load of vegetables up to the second summit in Dog Valley, where the road goes over towards the peak over in back of the mountain here—up at the head of Hope Creek; Hope Valley's down below there. We sold the whole load of vegetables, and we had some fruit that we bought—some peaches or something. Went down to Levy Zentner,

I think, and bought some cases of peaches or apples; I forget what it was. And we came home with \$40. That was a lot of money.

*You grew the vegetables yourself?*

Yes.

*What kind of vegetables did you sell?*

Carrots and lettuce, tomatoes, and all of that.

*what year would that have been when you took the wagon load up there?*

Nineteen twelve, thirteen. In the teens.

*That early. You were just a boy then, still?*

Just a kid, yes. I took them up there after I lost my fingers here in the Verdi box factory.

Then we hauled a load over to the Davies mill, and we met Mr. Davies. He had an automobile then. We met him up on the road. We used to leave in the evening about 5:00, so the vegetables would keep, see. And we drove all night up there.

*Was there good road?*

It was the Lincoln Highway!

*Oh, that was the Lincoln Highway! So it was a good road.*

We got up past the second summit and went down in what they call Sardine Valley. There used to be the railroad that went from Boca to Loyalton, the old narrow-gauge. Was it narrow-gauge? No, it wasn't. It was the B & L railroad—Boca & Loyalton railroad, see—before the Western Pacific was over there.

All right. We unhitched the horses and fed the horses, and we built a fire. We slept maybe an hour or 2, and then we hitched the horses up again, put the fire out, and away we went. We met him on the way, and he asked us how much we had in there, and we told him. I think we got around \$40 for that load. Then one time we hauled them clean to Loyalton! Twenty-eight miles!

*From here in Verdi?*

We left at...you know where the River Inn is?

*Yes, right.*

Down below the River Inn, there's a bar there. Sunnyside they call it.

*Right. That's when you had that farm?*

When we had that there. That's when we hauled the vegetables. All night, took us. We got over there in daylight— over at Loyalton, 28 miles.

*How could you see at night? How would you see with the wagon? Did the horses know?*

You'd be surprised; you can see good without....

*They'd just go right in the dark?*

Oh, yes. We stopped up there, fed the horses again. My dad used to make us do that because you start out about 5:00 in the evening. We had all the vegetables covered with moist cloths. When we stopped up there, we even sprinkled some more water from the creek that comes out of Davis Meadows and out of that other meadow up there. I got

a picture of myself hunting deer there. Then when we figured the horses were all right, we'd hook up the horses and away we'd go. We came into Loyalton at daybreak...just breaking day. So we put the horses in the livery stable.

We used to have livery stables in Reno. You don't remember, but I do, when there was livery stables in Reno, where they used to keep the horses.

*I don't remember it.*

You'd go to Reno and you'd drive in the livery stable, and you left your horse in the livery stable. They unharnessed the horses if you wanted, and they sponged him off if you wanted, and they fed him grain if you wanted. Cost you so much to leave your horse in there.

*Were they large stables?*

Yes. There was one on Sierra Street, one on Lake Street, and one on Evans Avenue. Besso had that one on Evans Avenue.

*Do you remember who had the other ones? Besso, he was Italian, too, wasn't he?*

Yes. His daughter, Caroline, she's still alive. Her son has the Goodyear tire company in Reno.

Then we let the horses eat a little while and rest. We took care of our animals. Then we hitched them up, and we'd deliver them all around town.

I'll never forget...like I told you, the certain things that makes such an impression on you that you never forget. Now, there's things that happened maybe 2, 3 years ago that I forgot all about.

Well, we were coming from the top summit, down to the second summit. The first summit, I should say, is the summit where



you go down into Dog Valley. From the top up there we were in between, coming down at daybreak. And here is a couple of people walking up the Lincoln Highway. We had a pistol, so my brother, George, with the jockey box.... There was 2 of you in the high seat, one that handles the horses with the reins, and the other one sits...and then here's the jockey box here. So here are these 2 men coming up just at daybreak, so my brother, George, grabbed a hold of the pistol, and we kept the horses trotting. They never stopped us or anything else, and we went right on. If they'd've stopped us, they'd've got hurt because *we were going to take that money home!* We were 14, 15 years old. My brother was only 1½ years or so younger than I was. And these 2 people were coming. They were colored, too, besides. When we seen that, that made [us] a little more nervous.

Just think. That's between the first and second summit, coming this way. That was a lot of...\$40, \$50 those days...oh!

*Lot of money, yes. You were telling me about the accident that you had in Euer Valley. There was a celebration up there or something? Was that at the end of the charcoal year, that same summer that you were up there with the charcoal?*

Yes.

*You said the Italian people came up from Truckee to have a party.*

It was a get-together of some kind. You see, all the timber was cut, and the roadway was through the trees, like a funnel. The horses were kind of trotting along, and the coyote jumped out. [There was] a stump of a tree. The horses shied. I was standing in the front end of the wagon, and the horses—

when they jumped to the side—hit that green stump, and it threw my dad and sister right off. The wagon run over my dad, but my little sister, Katie, hit a rock. She never moved. Killed her. I think it broke her neck. She was only 2 years old. She's buried up there. I go up every Decoration Day and decorate the grave. It was 1907. And then we moved down here.

*Well, then those horses ran away with you?*

No, they ran, but I grabbed the reins. I was about 8 years old, I guess, and I turned them around. They stopped in a little bit of a grassy spot, a meadow, like. And here comes this George Maffi. I don't know where he got the horse, but here he come on a horse. It was a work horse. We didn't have saddle horses; we had work horses. We had just left the camp, and I don't know how he.... Well, anyway, I wasn't there too long, [and] here he come. They figured that I'd be hurt, too. Those 2 horses, they were just calm and nice.

*You talked about the camp. What was that camp like?*

Well, they had sleeping quarters, little cabins built—kind of lean-tos—for the men to stay.

*They didn't use tents at all?*

No, I don't remember of any tents. My mother was doing the cooking for all of the men.

*Was she the only woman up there?*

Yes.

*Were any of the men married, or was your dad the only married man?*

Let me see, were there any of them married? I don't believe so—mostly all single men. Some of them young fellows died up here in Truckee. Capetti; he died...a young man. They were all single people. Some of them were married, and their wives were still in Italy, see.

*Other than your dad's or your uncle's place, were there any Italian hotels in Truckee at the time?*

Oh, yes. There's Rossarinis. They were from Tuscany. They had a hotel up there. Then there was the Costas. The Rossarinis had a clothing store in Truckee.

*What part of Italy were they from?*

I can't tell you.

*What about Costa?*

Northern part of Italy, but I can't tell you just what part. He had a big contract with the paper company, hauling the wood for the Crown Willamette Paper Company at Floriston. There used to be a large paper mill at Floriston, and he had the contract to haul... him and John Delfatti. John Delfatti was from a town just below from where I was born.

And this Rossarini...what's that young fellow's name? He is the Channel 4 reporter—John Firpo. His father married a Rossarini. So he's one of the Rossarinis. Mrs. Rossarini was a widow. Then this Firpo married her, and they had this one boy. They lived in Truckee.

Then, several years ago, I was down to a little town down in Oakland, I think, and I happened to go into this clothing store, and here was some of the Rossarinis had that clothing store.

*They stayed in the clothing business? [laughter]*

Yes. The others were Rossarini; they had a hotel and a bar and eating place, up River Street from my uncle. I can't remember any of the others. Wait a minute. Oh, yes. There was a Sala...2 brothers...Dan Sala and Bartolo Sala. They was from the town where I was born. Great big...they looked like to me they were about 7 foot tall...great big men. There was a Sala here in Reno, I think; I'm not sure whether they were related or not. They had a bar.

Then there was some more...a Besio from the town where I was born. The building is still there [where] you go to the shortcut. It's right alongside the road there. One of the Besios still has a clothing store in the other end of the town of Truckee.. West Truckee. He and his wife have a clothing store, one of the young fellows. The older boys are retired. [One] was a school principal down out of Stockton, one of those little towns out of Stockton.

*After your family left Euer Valley, where did they go? You told me about the icehouse in Truckee. Did your father work in the icehouse?*

Oh, yes.

*Which year did he work in the icehouse, or did he do it more than one year?*

I can't remember which year, but he was working at that ice plant where the sawmill is at there now in Truckee. They got the water from Trout Creek. See, Trout Creek comes down from where we were making charcoal. Euer Valley was sitting down here, and we had the camp up here; it wasn't right in Euer Valley. The camp was up here on the bench [looking at map or photograph]. It's all considered Euer Valley. And then the Trout Creek starts there and follows on down, and it drained out into the ponds of the ice plant.



*There were quite a few Italian men doing that? Ones that were staying with your uncle in his hotel?*

Oh, yes, sure.

*Then they'd work over there?*

They'd either work for the ice plants. ... See, there was several ice plants. That was a winter job. And soon as the logging operation closed down or the woods closed down—the sawmills didn't work in the wintertime because they never decked any logs—why, then they work in the ice plants. There was a lot of them, though, that had cabins up in the woods, even up here in back of Floriston at Duffy's Camp, as we call it. Up here in Big Meadows they even had cabins. Just a few years ago, there was 2 cabins with sod roofs still there.

*They'd spend the whole winter up there?*

They'd put the whole winter there. They'd cut this wood and bring in provisions in the fall of the year when the mills closed down, enough to last them all winter. Then, when they could work, when it wasn't snowing, they'd go out there and they'd cut wood.

*What about trap lines? Did they run trap lines?*

No, they didn't do any trapping that I know of.

Did I tell you about my father being trapped in one winter? That's before we came here. He was up at Castle Lake, right on the top of Donner and to the left there. They had 2 or 3 cabins in there. Castle Creek goes right on down to Norden, and they had a flume there.

Well, anyway, they got trapped there. Now, I don't remember when it was, but he

came over here in the late 1890s or early 1900s. They used to get \$1.50 a cord for cutting the wood. so this one winter, it was an early winter.

*Who got trapped? Your father and who else?*

My father and his 2 brothers. There was somebody else in another cabin. Well, anyway, there was quite a bit of snow—I don't know how much—but there should've been 6 or 8, maybe 10 feet of snow. They said awful early storm, because the geese were still migrating south. They could hear them. And here it started snowing, and they could hear the geese—wheet, wheet, wheet—battling the storm because they can only go so high, too; get any higher than that, they can't breathe.

They went to bed, and it was snowing. During the [night], my uncle Jim, the oldest, couldn't sleep anymore. So he got up, wondering why he couldn't sleep; that's what my father was telling us. So he started to build a fire in the wood stove and, oh, it wouldn't draw. So he opened the door, and when he opened the door of the cabin, why it's all snow! So he hollered at them and said, "Hey! We're snowed in here!" He figured that the stove-pipe was covered up, couldn't draw.

So they all jumped out of bed, and they put some clothes on, and they started digging, digging, digging, digging. They said they had the cabin half-full of snow, because that's the only way they could break through. So they went up, and they found the chimney. Then they came back and they patted and packed—packed the snow and made a stairway in snow. Then they got their buckets and washtubs, and they carried the snow out of the cabin... naturally. And my father said that they went out and picked up geese that were exhausted and were still alive. They said they had some nice fresh geese, something to eat.

He said that they marked the tree, and when they fell it in the spring, they had to dig down; there was still a lot of snow yet.... They'd dig down, dig down, dig down. That's before the...the sawmills didn't start then until about June, I guess. Well, anyway, when they dug down there, why, they felled the tree, and they measured...it was 41 feet!

*From there to the mark?*

Forty-one feet. I guess there's 40 feet of snow up there this year; I can't really say.

*Yes, I would think there'd be a lot.*

But they have been only keeping records since 1906, I understand.

Well, they cut that wood 2 foot. I think it was 2 foot, because then in the spring they'd turn the water in from Castle Lake into the flume. Then they'd haul the wood over there, and...one stick after another...cluk, cluk, cluk, cluk, cluk, cluk.

*Just send it right down to Norden?*

Yes, right down to Norden. I think that they used it in the locomotives. They used the wood at first, and then they went to coal. That's why they were cutting it up small because they were using it in the locomotives. The other wood that they cut for the paper company was 4 foot and split.

What I forgot to tell you about Truckee... we used to catch chipmunks and tie a little string around them and then carry them in our pocket. Then we used to sell them to the people on the train...on the observation car. Sometimes people would buy them.

*You'd go down when the train would come through Truckee? [laughter]*

Yes. The train would stop. Then we used to have the observation coach—a lot of people sitting out there. And sometimes we'd sell them. Fifty cents. When we got \$1, we really got something, in those days.

*Yes.[laughter] How would you catch them?*

Oh, we'd catch them up in the hills. We had traps.

Another thing I forgot to tell you was about the Chinese. The Orientals were not allowed in Truckee for years and years. They chased them all out of Truckee because they were taking over the work of the white people.

*Was that when you were there, or was that earlier?*

No, that was even when I was there.

*They wouldn't let them come in?*

No. But I think that they let them come back in in about the 1920s. But I remember my uncle, my father's oldest brother, Uncle Jim. One day a fellow by the name of John Cabona handed him a gun and said, "Come on, Jim. We're driving all the Chinamen out of Truckee." John Cabona had one hand missing, and he was quite a character up there in Truckee. He was one of the roughest boys in the community—honest and all, but afraid of nobody.

*So they went down and did it?*

Yes. He went along with them, and I don't know whether they hurt any of them or anything. I heard that they hung one up on the power line or tree or something. Anyway, there's a lot of history.

But what I want to tell you [is] that I remember that the conductor, before the train approached a certain community, why, he'd walk through the train..."The next station is Verdi! Verdi! We will stop here five minutes!" Or ten minutes, whatever it is. "The next one is so-and-so." Floriston and Boca and all that. And then before he'd get to Truckee he'd say, "No Orientals allowed off of the train!"

*No kidding! Just walk right through the train and say that!*

Yes. I forget when they drove them out; it was...oh, somewhere around the 1800s, I think.

*Your uncles were already here by then?*

Oh, yes. You see, the Chinese built a lot of this country, when they had them here to build the railroad. They went over and got them coolies, as they called them. Brought over boat loads. That was *England* done that. They used them to build the railroad in the late 1860s. I think the train came through here in 1868. Then they just turned them loose instead of taking them back.

We even have a camp up here on the hills named China Camp.

*So were there a lot of Chinese in Verdi?*

There was at one time, up at China Camp, yes. Of course, they were-not drove out of here, but, anyway, we still call it China Camp. I remember when there was still some houses there.

*Were there very many Chinese here?*

That I don't know, but there was enough that they used to do the logging for the Sunrise mill.

*Oh, they used to work for a mill?*

Yes.

*Were there Chinese when you came here to live?*

No, there were 2 Chinamen here...Charlie the Chinaman, we called him. Even have a picture of me standing there holding a saddle horse; I'm about maybe 9 or 10 years old. There's a picture over at that Donner Trail restaurant, me holding that horse in front of Charlie the Chinaman. He used to have us churn ice cream with a hand freezer. Took 2 of us to turn it.

*Why? Did he have a store or a restaurant?*

He had a candy store, an ice cream store. And I fought that fire when I was in the fire department. It started at Charlie the Chinaman's; I forgot his last name. Started there in the 1940s. I was still in the Reno Fire Department. I was still in the county firemen. It burned the church next to it, which they rebuilt. [It] burned Charlie the Chinaman's, the church, a residence, a 2-storey rooming house, another residence, a hotel, Joe Leonardi's Western saloon, and the Oak saloon....I think 8 buildings.

*Let's go back to when you came to Verdi. About how old were you when your family moved to Verdi?*

I was about 8 years old...about late 1907.

*How did you come here? Why did you come here?*

We came here [to] just a little ranch we called the Mitchell ranch. We took that over, and my father was growing vegetables.

*How big a place was that?*

Oh, maybe 10 acres.

*It was right here in Verdi?*

Right in town. Just up here, yes.

*And it was good for vegetables?*

Oh, yes. That's where we was growing the Burbank potato. You don't see it anymore. The agriculturalists in Burbank [California] ....

*Is that all you were growing, or did you have other vegetables, too?*

Well, we had a lot of other vegetables: carrots and lettuce and tomatoes and all that stuff. Then we used to sell it to the people here.

*Right here in Verdi, or did you go somewhere else, too?*

No, just here in Verdi.

*Were there other farmers doing the same thing, or were you the only one?*

Oh, yes. The Quilicis were hauling the vegetables clean to Truckee with the horses and a wagon, right out of Verdi. And there was another family before the Quilicis by the name of Piretto. They afterwards moved down to Mayberry where all them houses are built now. He had a little 25-acre ranch there; it's all homes now. That's how they made a living. They hauled the vegetables over the Dog Valley Grade clean to Truckee with horses!

*What about Reno? Did anybody take their vegetables from here to Reno?*

Oh, yes. Do you know Laiolo, head of the Pioneer bank?

*Oh, yes.*

The stone house is still there on Plumb Lane. [His father] was a great guy. The women wouldn't go to the store to buy vegetables; they'd buy them from Mr. Laiolo. Oh, yes. That was one of the main businesses. A lot of vegetable farmers out here on the valley used to peddle vegetables with a horse and a wagon all over town, everywhere.

*They have a route? They go from house to house?*

They had a route, a regular route.

*The lady'd come out and buy the vegetables?*

She'd pick up what she wanted right out of the spring wagon.

*Spring wagon?*

Yes. The spring wagon had a long bed... the seat and then a long bed. And one horse.

*Is that what your family did here in Verdi?*

We sold...we didn't peddle it, though.

*Didn't have to peddle it?*

We peddled it after we moved out of Verdi here. We did peddle vegetables. I thought I told you about that. We'd leave here about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening, and we hauled vegetables with the 2 horses and a spring wagon clean up to the logging camps and up to Sardine Valley and up on top of the second summit of Dog Valley Grade to the logging

camp. Mr. Davies had a sawmill right there in Sardine Valley, and he'd buy the whole load. Even up at the Verdi logging camp. Then we would haul them from down there, the other side of the River Inn. My dad had 12 acres there; we bought that in 1912, I think, or 1913.

*Let's stay with Verdi right now, because we need to figure out what your family did here in those 3 years. You went on the Mitchell ranch and you were growing vegetables. Were you working in the fields yourself or did you go to school, or a little bit of both?*

Oh, yes. We went to school, but we also worked in the field. And we milked the cows; we had a couple of cows there. Practically everybody in Verdi, if they could afford it, had a cow...and if they had a place where they could manage to keep a cow. Of course, there was also a Mr. Jepson, who was a milkman here; he used to deliver milk, every day.

Then after that, I'd get up, and I went to work in the box factory.

*Was that when you were a boy still, when you were little?*

It was around 1912. I was about 13 years old.

*This was after your family moved down to Mayberry, or you were still up here?*

No, before we moved.

*So you were here a few years, really?*

That's when we moved down there, when I cut these fingers.

*Tell me about that. What were you doing in the box factory? You worked in the farm, and*

*you helped your father, and your father sold vegetables?*

Yes.

*Who did he sell vegetables to?*

The people in Verdi.

*Did he go around with the wagon, or did they come to the farm?*

Come to the farm. Then, of course, most of the people those days had their own garden.

*Yes. That's why I can't understand why they bought from you.*

Of course, a lot of the people had the bars here, and they had the eating places in the back of the bar. They didn't have no garden, so they bought all the vegetables.

*In those days, were there any Italian bars here in Verdi?*

Oh, yes.

*Can you remember the ones that were here?*

Yes. Patrone. Leonardi. Panelli. Then there was Coe. He had a bar. Pincolini. They were big ranchers afterwards out in the valley. They built the Mizpah Hotel in Reno. They probably still own it. Then Joe Leonardi. After the place burned down, he moved to Santa Rosa [California]. And Patrone... one of the boys was partners in the grocery store—Brunetti and Patrone—in Reno. And Panelli. He's still alive; he's 95 years old, I think. He still owns this little post office building up here. It's vacant now. He has a grandson living here. I was talking to his son. His other son that

passed away married my first wife's youngest sister, one of the Devincenzis from Reno; I married a Devincenzi girl, Erma. And who else? Bony. No, he's French.

*They had a saloon here in Verdi?*

Yes. He owned the Verdi Hotel one time. It'd be his brother's son, Marcelle...Vic just passed away...but Marcelle is still alive, and he married a girl from Sierra Valley. She passed away here a year or so ago. He's still alive; I was talking about him just the other day. He was quite a character. he was a Reno boy. *Their* father had a blacksmith shop in Reno where they used to shoe horses.

*They were French?*

French and Italian. C. Lonkey is the one that moved the sawmill here from up near Hobart Mills. Now, wait a minute. He moved the sawmill in the early 1890s from up the Little Truckee River from Boca dam, I'm pretty sure. A good many years there was some cabins there, yet, and also piles of slabs. Those days they just piled the slabs, and then they would sell them to the people [who] used to even go up there with horses and wagons and get their slabs. Sometimes they'd haul them to the railroad and load them on flatcars and ship the slabs to the wood yards. That's even before coal came in this part of the country.

*Can you think of other Italian families that were in ranching here right around Verdi when you lived here? You said there were some other farms.*

Yes. The Quilicis. Then the Capurros, which is now known as the Belli ranch. They're—Bellis—Swiss-Italian. Then the

Canepa ranch. One of the boys is still there in the Verdi township down there by Mogul. Then there was the other Capurros down there in the Verdi township. See, the Verdi township goes clean the other side of the River Inn. Then, oh, there was the Schiappacasses. They're beyond though. The Pirettos and the Schiappacasses and the Capurros and up on the hill... Capetti.

*With so many families growing vegetables, wasn't there a lot of competition? Wasn't it hard to find customers?*

No.

*There was a big demand?*

A big demand in Reno because that was before the time that Levy Zentner moved in here. There was quite a few, especially the ones down along the river. What was those fellows' names? I was talking to one lady from the Pioneer Citizens Bank. She's an employee there; I think her name is Delia Rossi. I was kidding her and I said, "How old are you?" She knows me, and she said [Mr. Mosconi whispers], "I'm 55." She didn't want the other girls to hear, I guess. They had a ranch down there where the mental hospital [is] along the river there. They were all Italians in there. Oh, what was the other fellow's...I used to go down and buy some vegetables *from* them because we didn't have enough.

*To sell up here?*

To sell up there—Davis's Mill, Loyalton.

Now just think. We drove 2 horses and the spring wagon loaded with vegetables clean to *Loyalton*, California, over the shortcut which is 28 miles from Verdi. And from down there



at Sunnyside it's 5 or 6 miles further. About 34 miles to *Loyalton*.

*Yes. You said that you went to work for the box factory here, and you cut your fingers? Why don't you tell me about that?*

Well, I worked in the box factory at 15¢ an hour. This was in 1912, because I remember that Charlie Bruuns was the foreman. And he got a note.. a young man came up there from the depot agent over here, Mr. Broach. We had a SP [Southern Pacific] depot here, and Mr. Broach lived in the depot, a big 2-storey building; he raised his family here. He sent a young man up there with a note to Charlie Bruuns, the factory foreman, that there was going to be an airplane come over the hill. So he sent a fellow by the name of Ovila...French. He was the warehouse foreman, where we stored the [sets of the pieces used in assembling a single box], to go up on top of the warehouse, and he says, "When you see something coming over the mountain up there, you come on down." I laughed about that many times, and when I tell it, people laugh. He says, "You come down and tell us, and we'll shut the factory down, and we'll all come out and watch it." Well, by that time, where would that airplane be?

*Right! Over Reno!*

See how much we knew about airplanes?

*Yes. And you were working in the factory?*

I was in the factory. I'm pretty sure it's 1912. I was 13 years old.

*Is that when you first started in the factory, in 1912?*

Yes.

*Do you remember how you got that job?*

No, I don't remember. But I know that they were hiring young people. There were several young people in there. Then, when summer started....

*You weren't going to school anymore?*

No.

*So you quit the school at 12?*

About 12 years old. Then when the harvest season started in California, they'd put us to work at 6:00 in the morning in the box factory. From 6:00 to 6:00. And no overtime. Straight time. We made \$1.65 a day. We got paid once a month. The Verdi Lumber Company would send us a statement—so many hours, so much money—and they only withheld \$1.00, and that was for Dr. Wilcox. We had better doctor service then than we have today. He lived here with his family, and he used to ride around town here, all over everywhere on horseback. He had 2 little ponies that he rode around in, and he knew every child and every woman and every man here. And they paid us.... We'd go stand in line after supper. We'd hurry up and get down about 7:00 and stand in line, all of us. That would be the box factory and the planing mill and the sawmill and lumberyard.

*Did you have your supper right at the factory?*

No.

*You'd go home for supper and then come back?*

Go home for supper and then hurry up and get down there and stand in line.

*Yes, to get your check.*

Check? They paid us in gold and silver. We didn't know what a check or paper money looked like.

*Gold and silver?*

The only thing they had was \$20 gold notes, they called them. But they paid us in... well, I had 3 pieces of money. They're all gold. There was 2 twenties, and was it 2½ or 5 pieces of gold? I forget. I had those pieces in this pocket and my dad's pistol in this pocket.

*Really? You'd take the pistol?*

Walking up the track because we lived up there above town about a mile.

*What did you used to do with your money?*

Give it to my mother. She got every penny of it.

*You never did see any of it?*

Oh, once in a while. But that was to help raise the family. My father also was working in the lumberyard.

*He worked in the lumberyard and had the farm, too?*

Oh, yes, sure. Then he also worked for the power company, cleaning ditches with a pick and a shovel. I done that, too.

*By himself?*

No, with a crew of men. Mr. John Harker—Harker and Barker construction, their father—was the foreman. A fellow by the

name of Walt Phillips was the superintendent over it. They lived here in Verdi. That's how they cleaned all these canals, like the Highland Ditch.

*All by hand?*

All by *hand*—pick and shovel.

*They'd turn them off in the winter?*

No. In the wintertime they fought ice. They still do in these canals that furnish electricity...power canal. But that canal that furnishes the water to Reno—the Highland Canal, Highland Ditch—they kept that going year round.

*They never turned it off?*

Never turned it off, and you had to fight that ice. In the spring they'd turn the water out, and they had big crews of men from Reno and Verdi here. They had, oh, maybe a couple hundred men with a pick and a shovel.

*Do you remember what they used to pay them to do that?*

Yes, I've done it. Two and a half a day. That was good money.

*Were there a lot of Italian fellows doing that, cleaning out the ditches?*

Yes. The Babas. The Zuninos. Oh, lots of Italians. There was lots of Italian people here that worked on the section...on the railroad. You see, every 5 miles, they had a section crew, or a section station. There was one section foreman—Sabini—at Mogul. There was one in Truckee; I knew him—Cupples. His brother was the road master that lived in Truckee. I



went to school with some of the Cupples kids up in Truckee.

They had a section crew in Sparks, with a foreman. Every 5 miles there was a section crew with a foreman and a track walker. His job was to walk that track every day.

*Look out for problems?*

He had a mallet and a wrench on his shoulder. They put in the double track in 1914; before that it was single. So the double track, he'd go down one track about half-way to Mogul. Then he'd go over on the other track and walk back on the other track one day. Then the next day, he'd go up this way, half-way up here.

*And the other guy'd come down...?*

The other guy'd come down there. Then there was a section crew at Mystic. There was a section crew over at Floriston. There was a section crew at Boca. Section crew in Truckee. A section crew up at Horsehoe Bend above Donner Lake. Every 5 miles there was a section crew with the foreman and the track walker and 4 or 5 men.

*Were a lot of these fellows Italians?*

Oh, they were all Italians at one time. All Italians.

*Were they north Italians, mainly, from up around your country?*

Most of them here were from Tuscany.

*What about in the mills and in the lumberyards? Were there many Italians working in the mills and lumberyards here?*

There was quite a number Italians, and there was a lot of Norwegians here,

especially in the lumberyard. See, they used to stack the lumber to cure, to dry. That's before they had any dry kilns. Now they *cook* the lumber. They kill the fibers in it.

*Yes? [laughter]*

Yes, they do. Those days, they stacked it, 16 feet wide and 16 foot long. They had the foundations, see. They'd build them up off the ground so they could get the air circulation. Then they'd put one layer of boards.. .not too close together. Then they'd put a 2-by-4 here and a 2-by-4 in the center and a 2-by-4 there at the bottom. And they were all pine. The only fir that they used was the 2-by-4, see. They'd cut a good fir tree every now and then, and then they made mostly 2-by-4s or railroad ties because the fir was cheaper lumber. And then the 2-by-4 were mostly dried 2-by-4s, naturally. A dry 2-by-4 fir, laid across these green pine, *would not stain* the pine. They'd leave them there about 120 days. This was the best drying yard in the whole country here, on account of that natural funnel.

*That wind coming down the canyon?*

Yes. And you know even Westwood—the Red River Lumber Company—in the teens, there was a talk here.... I was working in the sawmill then, in the teens during the war. I worked 15 hours a day!

*How many days a week?*

Six days a week. They couldn't find any workmen; everybody was at war—the First World War.

*You didn't go to war?*

No. I was greeted by President Wilson and had my examination and all, and then in September I got a notice to stand by and then 11 November 1918, that's when the armistice was signed.

*So you were almost about to go?*

They told me to stand by.

*Let's go back and pick up that accident. You said you were working in the box factory. You were going to tell me about your fingers and how you got them cut.*

I got them cut in the rip saw they used to make the boxes. Used to push the boards through.

*You'd push them through with your hand?*

We had a picaroon and also with your hands. See, you had a picaroon here, and then like that [demonstrates] so I went down there and here, see, that's what happened.

*You slipped and shoved your hand in there?*

Yes.

*So it took, what, 2 fingers off?*

It took this one here, this one here. See, this joint here is gone. See how old I was? Then this one here, too, was cut all the way around here. And [Dr. Wilcox] stuck this piece back on without the joint.

*On your index finger?*

I told him afterwards, "You got it on there kind of crooked!" Anyway, Leland Nicholas was my partner. In fact, I was the swamper.

He was supposed to be running those boards through, and me, I'd be on the other side pushing them out. He'd gone someplace, and I was doing that so I got that cut.

Well, they found this piece here; they couldn't find this part from my thumb in the sawdust...big sawdust pile. They wrapped some rags over my hand here, and they walked me from up there at the box factory about, oh 1½ or 2 miles down to Dr. Wilcox that lived over here. Then they laid me down on a table—got me in the shed, kind of a little house out in the back there. And talk about anesthesiasts today and all this and that. They handed my partner...I think it must have been chloroform. They put a rag over my nose here, and then Nick started.. doctor told him what to do. Pretty soon, the doctor says, "Well, I think he's about ready." So he started snipping on this here, and I pulled back and he says, "Whoop! Give him another shot, Nick!" When I came to there was some lady there; I don't know who she was. Nick went back up to work in the factory, and so they left this lady there to watch me, I suppose. When I came to, why, I didn't know what I was talking about.

But anyway, that was the end of my box factory work. And I never got a penny for that. There was no such thing as industrial [insurance] or anything.

*They never paid any of it?*

No.

*Did you have to pay the doctor for all of that?*

No.

*Because that one dollar a payday covered it?*

That one dollar took care of it.

*You never went down to the hospital in Reno; they just did it right here in Verdi?*

And Leland Nicholas was my anesthesiast. He had sawdust all over him and everything else.

*[laughter] So you never went back to the box factory after that?*

No. From there is when we moved back to the other side of Mogul on a ranch.

*What year would that have been that you got your fingers cut?*

About 1912 or 1913.

*When your father first came here to take that Mitchell ranch, do you know how he got that ranch? How did he find out about it?*

I don't know how he found out about it. We were living in Truckee and Uncle Jim sold his business. He's the one that knew all about this ranch.

*Do you know why he left this ranch and went down to the other ranch? What made him change his mind and leave this one and go down there?*

That I can't tell you. Oh, wait a minute. What was that man's name that owned that piece of land down there? He came after us to sell us that ranch. We bought that ranch for \$900. Twelve acres. We were there 2 or 3 years, and we sold it for \$1,200.

*So you made a good profit?*

Yes.

*Was he an Italian fellow who had the ranch before?*

No. It wasn't really a ranch; it wasn't really developed. The only thing that was there [were] some trees that he'd planted. He just bought that for an investment.

*Didn't have a house, either?*

Yes, there was a little house there. Nice, cute little house. There was 2 of us boys...

*Your brother was younger?*

Younger than I.

*Did you have a sister then?*

Yes, we had a sister, also. There was 3 in the family then. We ended up with 6 of us.

*You told me that you had a sister who was born in Italy and who died young?*

Yes, she was born in Italy. She was the first in the family.

*Did you know her at all? You weren't alive then?*

I don't remember anything about her.

*What happened to her?*

I don't know. My mother never said anything, ever.

*She just died as a little baby or a little child?*

Little baby.

*Who was born next in the family?*

I was.

*So you were the eldest, really—the eldest that survived. After you, who came?*

My brother George. He was born about 18 months younger than I.

*Let's talk a little bit about George. He grew up here, too, didn't he, around Verdi?*

Yes.

*Did he go to school? Did he go to high school, for instance?*

No. He never went to high school. I think he finished grammar school.

*Did he work with your father a lot, on the ranches and all that?*

Yes. He also worked in these sawmills. He turned out to be a sawyer in Verdi and Hobart Mills and Loyalton and even up in Oregon.

*He moved up there?*

He was quite a mill man. Yes, he was very highly trained in sawmill work. He was also a fireman in the fire department with me here in Reno. He quit the same time that I did and the rest of us. We resigned in April of 1945, and then he went back into sawmilling again. He was the sawyer in this sawmill down here just the other side of the River Inn.

*After the fire department he was down there?*

Yes.

*How long did he stay down there? Or what did he do after that?*

He worked the sawmills up in Truckee and Loyalton... in Loyalton mostly. He was sawmilling pretty near the biggest part of his life, except for when he was in the fire department for 15 years.

*Always working as a sawyer?*

As a sawyer.

*Did he get married?*

Yes.

*More than once or just once?*

Just once. Had no children.

*Who was his wife?*

Mary Martin from Loyalton, California. She's still alive. He died....

That's one thing that I can never remember—when even my wives pass away. I want to forget. Why is it that I forget the dates? He's buried up here [in Verdi] in the same plot [as] my mother and father and one of my wives and my youngest brother, Henry, too, that died. He's been dead, oh, 6, 7 years.

*Where was George living before he died?*

He was living in Reno. He owned property on Keystone Avenue.

*He and his wife were living in Reno, and she's still alive? Does she still live in Reno?*

Yes.

*So, at the end of his life he was a property owner; he wasn't a sawyer?*

No.

*What kind of property did he have there?*

Just a regular home is all.

*He was retired?*

Yes. He died from lung cancer mostly, I think, from the sawdust in that sawmill all the time. The sawmills would close in the wintertime, years ago. And in the spring we would clean to get ready. On the beams we'd find 6 inches of dust.

*Real bad for breathing?*

Sure. All these people that are working in those box factories and things like that, in the wood, they all wear protection—masks. Not in those days. Especially the sawyer—especially that bark dust.

*That's really bad?*

Oh, couldn't see it.

*But you were breathing it?*

You were breathing it. That's what he died from. You had nothing for it.

*Now, after George, who was the next one in the family?*

My sister, Madeline—Lena, we called her. Madalena.

*That's a pretty name. Did she go to high school?*

She had good schooling. I think she did; I'm not sure.

*Where, in Reno?*

She moved from this place to that place and that place. She was very brilliant; she could read and write Italian—learned it in this country. She was born over there, too.

*Born in Italy?*

Yes.

*But then she learned how to read and write Italian over here?*

Over here.

*In school or from your folks?*

No. Just from the folks and herself...used to write to the relatives. After Mama passed away, she was the only one that used to write to the relatives over in Italy. Of course, it was in English over in Australia.

*Oh, she wrote to the relatives in Australia, too?*

There was 4 uncles in Australia, and 2 of them came back to Italy millionaires—gold and silver miners. They came back to Italy to die, I guess, to live the rest of their life. Uncle Mike and Uncle Martin. They sent their wives first; I don't remember if Martin had a wife or not, but Michael did. He was one of the best soldiers in Italy. They're the high class.

*Yes, right.*

And he came back. Joseph married an Australian girl, and he bought up a lot of land. He was a landowner—a rancher, we call them here; I don't know what they call them over there. He was also the head—a conductor—of

an orchestra. And Uncle Dick was here in Verdi. He was the youngest of the family; he was a renegade of the family, I guess you'd call him—I called him. He married a girl here, and then he took off. He got wounded in the war over there.

*Took off with her or without her?*

No, without her. He left her here. She was a French girl. I don't know whatever happened to her.

Let me see...then there was Margaret. She was born in February 1907.

*Let's talk about Lena some more because I am not through with Lena. So Lena was very bright and knew how to read and write Italian. You said she was married, I think, 3 times. Before she got married the first time, did she used to work anywhere? Did she have a job?*

No. She got married in Stockton.

*Was the husband Italian?*

He was Italian. [Bill] Candido.

*What did he do?*

He worked for me over in Loyalton, and he just done any kind of a job that he could get a hold of: that's all.

*Was he born in Italy or born in this country?*

No. He was born in Stockton. The Kellogg family niece moved here for a divorce, and I was her first ranch foreman down at the Mayberry ranch. This woman wanted a ranch foreman—the “western ranch foreman.” During Prohibition days she built a bar in this big mansion. That was [Governor] Sparks's

mansion, the Mayberry ranch. I don't know why they called it Mayberry ranch. The first Hereford cattle in this western country was right there.

Anyway, the first thing you know, here come this gal from back East someplace; then here come another gal from back East someplace. And me, I was going with my going-to-be first wife very steady. That was no place for me, not with *all* of those fancy girls around there. So I told her...she even came up here to the ranch and tried to talk me out of it...”Well,” I said, “I got to leave because I'm getting married.” That's just before I went into the fire department. So I got him the job.

I made a mistake because he got mixed up with the girls and they got a divorce.

*Did they have children?*

They had one girl. She lives in Sparks.

*Is she married?*

She *was* married; she's not married now. Her husband died of heart...young man. He was from Verdi.

*What was his name?*

Larson. She had a boy and a girl, and the boy never married. He's in the real estate business in Reno. The girl married a fellow from Winnemucca—Italian. They have...I don't know how many children. Oh, man!

*A lot of them?*

Yes.

*And they live where?*

In Winnemucca.



*What's he do up there?*

They were big people down there. I can't tell you exactly, but they were in the wine business, things like that.

*What's his name?*

Oh, I used to know his name very well. I can't tell you now.

*What did Lena do after she got divorced? Did she go to work?*

Yes, she worked here and there. Mostly she worked for John Ascuaga's Nugget. She retired from there. Worked there for a good many years.

*What did she do there?*

That I don't know. That's when she married this fellow by the name of Hale. He was an engineer in the Sparks engineering department. They didn't last long. I don't know what happened. Then she married this fellow, Ghrist. He was a very brilliant...a conductor on the railroad train. They had one son, and he married the cutest Basque girl from Winnemucca, and he's up in Elko. He has a son who's graduated from the university and a daughter that's a beauty queen or something. She's graduated from...well, I sent her a \$25 check.. high school. The boy is very brilliant. He was working for the telephone company here, and then they shipped him to Elko.

*Do they come and see you sometimes?*

Oh, yes.

*What about the one in Winnemucca with all the kids? Do they come here and bring the kids?*

Yes, they love them—beautiful. He [Ghrist] married the prettiest Basque girl, I think, in America. Her mother's still alive—a widow, lives in Winnemucca.

*There was also Margaret. You said that Margaret was born in 1907. Was she the one that was killed in the accident up by Truckee?*

No. That was Katie. Katie was born before Margaret.

*But after George or before George?*

Katie was born 1906.

*And she just died as a very little girl, right?*

Yes, 2 years old.

*OK. But then Margaret....*

Was born right after her.

*Is Margaret still alive?*

Yes, she lives here and owns a little trailer court and that service station down here. Her husband died; he was in the Reno Fire Department with me; he was a captain.

*What was his name?*

Ernest Zunino. He was born up on Washington Street, up there where they call Little Italy.

*They used to call Washington Street Little Italy?*

Yes, up on the hill.

*Were there a lot of Italians up there?*

All Italians, practically.

*What did Zunino do? What was his job?*

Well, he worked in grocery stores. In fact, he worked in Brunetti and Patrone. That's mostly what he done. Then afterwards, I got him a job in the tire department, and he worked up to captain, same as I did. He quit when we all quit. Then he went to work for Joseph Larralde that had a route and hauled materials and everything up to Lake Tahoe and Carson City and Genoa and all of that country, in a truck. He worked for him for quite a while.

*As a truck driver?*

Yes. After that, he and a fellow by the name of Nick Mollinoni\* from Jackson, California, had built this service station down here and the trailer court.

*Here in Verdi?*

Yes. The service station is closed now. I see they got it rented again. I even loaned them the money to buy that.

*Is Zunino still alive?*

No. He died quite a few years ago. I think from smoke. He never drank. He was a very good man. Good, steady worker. But I think smoke was his problem, cigarettes.

She is the mother of 2 sons. One of them is the one that owns the River Belle grocery store now, or has the grocery store leased, in Verdi. He also was the head salesman for the Kirman family hardware store in Reno. They were also bankers at one time, I think. They had a fire; I fought the fire over on the plaza. Their hardware was on the corner of Plaza and

Virginia. They were a very highly recognized Reno family—very popular family.

*The Zunino boy—the son—worked for them before he had the market here in Verdi?*

The son worked for the next hardware market down past Alameda Avenue. He's there now. The other son was in the service, and he graduated from the college over in Susanville. He was also a councilman of Susanville or senator or county commissioner; I'm not sure. He married a Susanville girl, and then he also went into the business over there. He had a hotel, and now he lives in Reno. They sold out there, and they moved to Reno and bought property in Reno.

*What's his name?*

This one down here, I think, is Marvin. I don't see him very often. He married an Austrian girl. She was the beauty queen out there in Susanville one time. He bought a piece of property out on Wells Avenue, I think it is.

*Does Margaret still own the trailer park?*

Yes. She has her own beautiful trailer there—runs the trailer park.

*Did she ever remarry after her husband died?*

No, never did. She lives alone.

*OK. Did Margaret ever work during her married life? Did she have a job at all when she was married to Mr. Zunino?*

She didn't work anyplace. When her and her husband and Mollinoni bought this property down here, they run the restaurant



in that. That's where she worked there. I paid for her schooling down in Stockton before she married.

*Oh, she went to school in Stockton?*

We sent her to school down in Stockton.

*What school? Was it a private or public school?*

Stockton College, that's all I know. I know I was paying for it. That's when I was stationed up in Loyalton. This is in the 1920s. I had a big contract up there in Loyalton with the big Feather River Lumber Company.

Then my brother, Jim, was born right here. I remember when he was born—the thirtieth day of June, 1909. I'll never forget that! Why is it? That I don't know. He lives in Verdi. He was in the Second World War and in Vietnam and all of them.

*He was in the military, then?*

Yes.

*Was he a military man all of his life?*

No. He worked mostly for the power company. He retired from the Sierra Pacific Power Company. He has a wife, and they have no children, but they had an adopted daughter. She was here not too long ago, and she was in Germany; she's been all over the world. She married a captain in the army. They were living down in California, and they were also in Germany, and now they're back in one of the southern states. But she's a very brilliant nurse. She adopted—I don't know why—the kid is colored. She says, "I'm making a study." And they adopted this kid.

*How old is he now?*

Oh, I'd say he's...8 or 9 years old.

*Let me back up just a minute. Your brother Jim is still alive and lives in Verdi?*

Yes. He's retired. He's one of those kinds of fellows that buys something, and then you come along and offer him a profit, and he'll sell it to you right now.

*Oh, yes? [laughter]*

He moved from one place to another and another—that's how he made his money.

*He's a horse trader?*

He's a horse trader! He's got a third acre down there, and he's got that for sale. Going to sell that, too—"Any time they give me a certain percentage—any more than what I paid for it—they can have it. I fall in love with no place!"

*He just moves and moves?*

He's made nothing but a barrel of money. Yes, he'll move right now.

*After Jim who was born, who's the next one?*

Henry. Hank. He was the justice of the peace here for a long time.

*OK. Let's talk a little bit about his life. He's dead now?*

Yes.

*What was his first job? Was he helping you on the ranch?*

Well, he was into ranching, always ranching until he lost his arm in an accident

at Mogul, between here and Reno. He was coming home, and there about Mogul on the old road, on the turn there, a truck sideswiped him. He was [in] a coupe, and he had his arm like this, and the truck sideswiped him.

*Took his arm right off?*

Well, it didn't take it off but it crushed it. I was in the fire department then. It happened in the early 1930s. We could never find the truck; truck never stopped or anything. Big van was what it was...on the sharp turn right at Dobie Flat, we used to call it. We've got all these places named. The first off-ramp, in Mogul, that's Dobie Flat. When it rained there, you better not walk through there because that adobe just clumped on to your boots and you couldn't move. It wasn't paved, and we'd always look at the other end. If there was a car—very seldom, automobiles those day. But if you were going down with a car yourself, there were ruts that deep. You'd look at the other end, and if there was a car coming the other end you'd wait here until he got up at this end or by where the river makes the bend there, where them homes are. If you both got in a rut about half-way down there, you couldn't either one of you get out. You're that deep.

Well, anyway, at the other end of it, it was different than what it is now. It went up. There was a little hill we went up, and then there was a big curve there—we named that Bony's Curve. We had a Frenchman here—Bony—that owned the Verdi Hotel, and then it burned down and then he had a business here. He used to do quite a bit of drinking, and he'd always run of that curve, so we named it Bony's Curve.

Just the other side of that there was another sharp turn, and that's where it happened. I even went with the deputy sheriffs

of Reno, Washoe County; even drove down to Fallon to check those trucks of Kent and Company. And we stopped a truck in Utah, but we couldn't prove....

*So your brother lost his arm?*

Took him to the hospital and Dr. [A. L.] Stadtherr, noted surgeon there, called me up at the fire department, and I went out there. He held up the arm like that and he says, "Joe," he says, "we've got to take it off." So I gave him the OK to take it off.

*But your father was still alive?*

Yes.

*why didn't they call your father?*

Well, they called me because, I guess, maybe he felt my father probably would have told him to call me. My father put everything over onto me.

So then he got married, over on the ranch. We owned, then, the Donner Trail ranch. When he got married I knew that he didn't want to stay there, so I'm the one that got the lumber and built the grocery store for him. I bought the lumber and everything else and hired the men to build the building. A fellow by the name of McCree, a retired army man—he married a Mrs. Hill, a widow; she's still alive—was quite a handyman, carpenter, so I had him build the building for a grocery store, and then my brother paid me. Him and his wife.

*Who was his wife? Who did he marry?*

He married Virginia Mustilatto\*. Her father was from Switzerland. He was a logger, and they were here from down on the Russian

River [in California]. Down in that country. Then he was a logger up here in this country, and then he logged here up out of Floriston. His oldest daughter was up here. They lived in the camp up there, and so my brother met the girl and married her.

*How old was he when they got married?*

He was in his twenties somewhere. I'm not sure. I never kept track much of anything like that.

*OK. Then they moved into a house behind the grocery store here in Verdi. Is that grocery store still standing?*

It's a bar now. They closed it up as a grocery store because they weren't doing too good. They were doing pretty fair, but not....

*So Henry made it into a bar?*

Yes.

*Was he running the bar?*

Yes.

*What about his wife? Was she working at all?*

His wife went to work in the post office; she's now retired.

*Here in Verdi?*

Yes.

*And Henry became the justice of the peace?*

He became justice of the peace here, and nobody could ever beat him.

*When did that happen? Was he still with the bar business when he became justice of the peace?*

That's funny; I can't remember. He was justice of the peace a long, long time. I think he was justice of the peace even when he had the bar.

*After he leased the bar what did he do? Was he only justice of the peace or did he do something else?*

That's all he done, just justice of the peace.

*That's a full-time job?*

Yes.

*How did he become justice of the peace? Did he have a good education?*

When we were down on the Marks ranch on Mayberry Drive, he used to ride a bicycle to the high school every school day.

*So he got some schooling, then?*

I'm not Sure whether he graduated high school or not.

*Did he go to college?*

No.

*How long ago did Henry die? Has he been dead for very long?*

Oh, he's been dead let's see.... See, even my family, I don't keep track of those things. Here, at an accident or anything else, nothing stops me. But I don't even like to go in the hospital and see those people. And the cemetery?

Nothing bothers me at all because it's got to be done. Then after that, I don't know what good'll...I don't like to go back. Why should it have that effect on me?

*You must have seen a lot of things in the fire department*

I've seen all kinds of things, and I had to be the leader. A lot of those fellows...they'd turn their head and they'd get sick, some of them. Some of the firemen! And me, I went right out ahead.

Well, Henry's been dead 3 or 4 years, I would say.

*So it hasn't been a long time, really?*

No.

*How many children did Henry have?*

He had 3 girls and 1 boy.

*OK. Well, tell me a little bit about each of them.*

The girl, Barbara Ting, they live here. She has got a big job in for the county.

*Is she married to Peter Ting, the bug spray fellow?*

Yes.

*I know Peter Ting; I went to school with Peter.*

Did you? Well, she married Peter Ting, and she has a son, young Steven—he's quite an athlete up at the university on the football team. Great big, husky fellow.

*His father's a big man, too.*

Yes. They have a daughter, also, that's attending the university. The boy, I think,

first he was going to be an accountant or one of them big jobs. But I think he's changed his mind to be a veterinarian.

*Does Barbara work right now?*

Yes. She works for the county; I think she's in the tax department.

*So she goes to Reno every day?*

Yes.

*And they live here in Verdi?*

They live here in Verdi, and they have a beautiful home. Then they have the old home that Papa and Mama, my father and mother, used to live in. She acquired that, and then she has a beautiful...first home as you go up the hill over here. They had some property here on this side, but they sold that. She's very well thought of. She's also the secretary-treasurer of our cemetery association here. See, I'm the one of the members, and then they made me the custodian here, so I do the work.

*Is she the oldest?*

Yes.

*Who's the second oldest?*

The second one is Margie, Victor Clark's wife; she's the justice of the peace now. And the third one is the son, Henry, Jr. [Buddy]. He's a head surveyor for the Sierra Pacific Power Company. Kelly is Henry Jr.'s wife.

*Let's talk a bit about the justice of the peace. What's her name?*

Her name is Margie Clark. And then there's Laura. Laura's the youngest one.

*Well, did Margie go to college?*

She got quite a bit of education. I don't know whether she went to college or not. I think she graduated from high school.

*What does her husband do?*

He joined the Reno Fire Department. He was working for one of the hospitals while he was going to school, and I'm pretty sure that he attended the university.

*Where does Henry, Jr., live now?*

He lives here in Verdi. He's got a brand new home up here on the property that I used to own. I turned a portion over to him and the other portion to Margie and her husband and then the other portion to the youngest niece, Laura.

*It was all together there?*

All one piece of property, and then [Victor Clark is] building one of the best looking mansions in Verdi. Right now he's got it about half built. Got all his furniture and everything stuffed in here.

*So they're going to move up there?*

They're going to move up there.

*Do you own this house here, too?*

I don't own it, no.

*But that once belonged to your family, didn't it?*

My mother and father bought that, and then we turned it over to the youngest son, Henry, the justice that had the grocery store.

*That's where they lived?*

Yes, Virginia owned it. My mother and father lived here, but my mother passed away up in the old house. Then I moved my father down here. That's when I bought this place. This used to be on the highway right-of-way. Henry had this lot here, so I just moved this house here.

*How long ago was that?*

Oh, God, I don't know. It was when they built 80. In the 1960s. That cost me \$10.

*Ten dollars! For the house! [laughter]*

For the house, yes, and then I had to have a new roof put on it.

*Did you have somebody check it out see if it was worth \$10? [laughter]*

Well, I was going to get it for 5! But then there was a fellow by the name of Nicholas that built up here this side of the Last Chance, that truck stop there. Just for the hell of it, he bid...well, he made me up to \$10.

*He ran you all the way up to 10?*

Yes. Of course, \$10 was worth a little more then than it is now.

*But not that much more! [laughter]*

Then, of course, Bevilacqua hauled it down here.

*Bevilacqua from Reno?*

The moving outfit in Reno. I think they're still in that business. There was 2 Bevilacqua families in Reno; they're both house movers. Even the Donner Trail ranch... the main [building] used to be the stagecoach stopover...that was moved back 90 feet. Bevilacqua moved it.

*Did you know the Bevilacquas from before?*

Oh, yes, I knew them from here.

*Were they in Verdi originally or in Reno?*

No, Reno.

*Were they from Italy originally?*

Yes. One of them lived to be up in the 90s, and they were going to make him move. Do you know what bureau would that be that took over part of Reno—federal bureau—and classed it as a poor-man's area or something?

*Oh, maybe HUD [Housing and Urban Development] or something like that?*

Something to that effect. They reclassified the whole area, and he wouldn't move. He said, "Well," he says, "the way you can move me off of here is in a coffin." He said, "I won't move off of here. This is my property, and federal government or nobody is going to move me off of here." And, by golly, they didn't. The house is still there.

*They left him there? [laughter]*

Pretty sure he's dead. He used to come up, and he used to take this little trip to the little old Verdi creek place. Yes. He was quite a guy.

*What's that trip up to where?*

Trip up the creek to that little burg up there. Up in Verdi. See, years ago, people used to call us hicks...up the creek. Said little burg that's up there. He says, "It's a little burg way up there up along the river. Up there by that mountain up there." Now everybody wants to live here.

*So when they used to say "I'm up the creek," it meant Verdi in those days...to go up the creek?*  
[laughter]

Yes.

*Where was Bevilacqua from in Italy? Do you remember?*

Genoa, Genovesi.

*And he was always in the moving business here in Reno?*

Yes. Both families.

*Were they brothers?*

Yes. Two brothers. Then there was one of them was a shoemaker, I think.

One of them had 2 or 3 boys, and one of them had 2 boys. One boy ended way up in Alaska or someplace. They're still in business here.

*Your brother Henry had one more girl. We talked about Buddy, we talked about Margie, we talked about Barbara, but then there's one more girl. What's the last girl's name?*

Then there's Laura.

*OK, Laura. We didn't talk about Laura.*



Laura was working in the county tax department. I think she's working like Barbara.

*Is she married?*

No. She was married, and her and her husband got a divorce. She's never married after that.

*She live in Reno or here in Verdi?*

She owns property in Reno, but she wants to sell that and move up here. So I asked them, "What are you going to name that place up there—Mosconiville?"

*What, here in Verdi?*

Yes. [laughter]

*I was just thinking—I wasn't going to say it—but about half of Verdi are your relatives, it seems to me. [laughter]*

Well, yes.

*Mosconiville. That'd be a good name for it.*

I was just over on the California side. You see, the fire department has a agreement with Sierra County, California, to protect those people over there, and I was over there checking a piece of the road out. It was impassable all winter—that shortcut that was put in there by the U.S. Forest Service. I was over there checking it, and they've got it all fixed now so we can go through there in an emergency. Well, everybody can now. And here's some employee in a parked car there with Sierra County checking all the vehicles and the transportation that goes through there. So, I asked him, "Why don't you people

name this now Crystal Peak like it used to be before the railroad went through here, before they moved Crystal Peak and called it Verdi?"

And he said that they were thinking about it. They're still building homes over there.

*Oh, yes?*

And all those people, naturally, are working in Reno, if they're working, and they spend all their money here in Nevada. I showed him exactly where the town of Crystal Peak [was] situated. I even remember when there was still some apple...in fact, there's one apple tree still alive over there. There were several homes when I was a young man that're still there. See, in 1868 when the railroad went through here—and that's when they went to Reno, in 1868—they knew that that would be the end of the stagecoaches. So they established the town here.

*How far over was Crystal Peak from here?*

Well, it's just across the line. I'd say 2 miles at the greatest, just past the cemetery. Well, there's people buried from...the old people that lived there...in that cemetery. There was homes built just the other side here, at the state line. From here on, there was homes built all over in there, kind of a strip.

*Did you have any more brothers and sisters, or was Henry the youngest?*

Well, that's all, Of course there was 2 of them that died.

*Yes, we talked about those.*

There was 4 of us boys—my mother was the mother of 4 boys and 4 girls.

*Let's go back, now, to when your family moved to Mogul. You said in 1912 or 1913 your family moved down to that little ranch below Mogul?*

Yes.

*You didn't own this one up here?*

No.

*You don't know what your dad paid to rent this?*

No, I don't.

*You were 14 years old when your family moved down there to Mogul?*

Yes.

*And you put in vegetables there. Did you grow those Burbank potatoes there, too?*

Yes.

*And all kinds of other vegetables?*

Carrots and turnips and tomatoes and lettuce and all of that. Like I said, we used to load up the wagon to haul it up into these mountains. Why, I even had to go down to Reno and...these other ranches. ...oh, what's those other ranchers' name? A very well known family.

*Not Oppio?*

The Oppios! I bought a lot of vegetables from the Oppios, the father. Levy Zentner then had moved in; they were on Commercial Row... or Third Street. I used to go and buy crates of fruit and have some fruit with me, also.

*So you'd have more to sell?*

Yes.

*Do you remember what kind of a mark up you used to put? If you had to pay Levy Zentner so much, how much would you mark it up?*

I don't remember. I know that we'd come home with about \$40 for the whole load—go clean to Loyalton for \$40. But that was a lot of money in those days.

*Did you take milk with you, too?*

No.

*Just fruit and vegetables?*

Just the vegetables.

*So your dad was growing those vegetables there. Was he doing anything else when he was there on that ranch?*

Yes, he worked for the ditch company.

*Oh, cleaning those ditches?*

Cleaning those ditches.

*Was he still working in the lumberyard up here?*

No. He quit that. Then in the wintertime he also would be on the ice crew.

*Where? Here in Verdi?*

No...the ice on the Highland Ditch to keep the water running. I remember one time...1913 or 1914...the whole ditch froze up. And they had several hundred men and me and my brother George; my brother George was about 18 months younger than I. We were up on the ditch—my mother had 2, 3 pairs



of wool socks on our hands—with lamps, all bundled up for the cold which was] way below zero. You're going to see it again. It was around 10 or so below zero in Reno! They had us up there because that was the only water for the city of Reno. They had us up there with these lanterns holding them for the men. And do you know where the men were? They were in the ditch up to their waist in water! And ice! Solid...pretty near solid ice! They were busting that ice up to get it so they could slush it out and dump it.

*Just to keep the water going?*

Just to keep the water going.

*Did they have boots on?*

They had boots, but they'd be in the water above the boots! Solid ice!

*So they'd be soaking wet.*

Tommy True, one of the head electricians for the power company, went up there. He came and borrowed a saddle horse from us. Pretty near every rancher had a saddle horse those days. He borrowed the horse and went up working on the power line or something up there. Instead of going down to the Mayberry flume—there was a little bridge there, and he didn't know about it—he tried to lead the horse across to jump the ditch. Well, the horse couldn't jump the canal, and the horse drug him back in there. He got all wet, of course. Then he finally went down to the Mayberry flume or canal—that's what it's known as, the Mayberry flume—just up above our ranch there. Then here he come on the horse, just about froze to death, and my mother seen him. She went out and drug him off the horse and drug him in the house. He was pretty near

froze solid. Tore all his clothes off of him and set him up...those days we only had a wood heating stove.. .set him up back of the stove; wrapped him up in a blanket.

The next day, I took him to Reno—that was 1913 or even 1916—[with] our buggy horse, Mary, with a 2-wheeled cart. My mother made me take him to Reno. I had to guide the horse; there was *so much snow* that the horse was plowing through the snow. Generally, a horse stays on the road, but I had to guide the horse to keep her on the road because she couldn't tell where the road was.

That was the winter that there was a record snow in Reno; they had 4, 5 feet of snow in Reno. Wait a minute...I got it here. [Mr. Mosconi reads from a clipping] "Record snow for Reno, January 1916, 65.9 inches." That's 5½ feet.

Yes.

In the teens I was working for the power company about 3 miles down the river here. The ditch that [carries] the water to generate the power plant down at Mogul there's a tunnel through there. They had to tunnel through so they could take the water out of the river here. And we were cementing this tunnel, the whole thing. The ceiling of it. And here came 2 men [on] Lincoln Highway—that is, the highway to San Francisco— 2 men walking face-to-face. Well, this man walking backwards from... did you ever hear about it?

No.

From San Francisco to New York. And this other man, of course, was seeing that he done it.

*He was going the easy way...forwards?*

And he was going the easy way, yes. I thought maybe you'd like to know about that.

*Yes. What did you do those 3 years that your father owned that farm down there by Mayberry? Did you work just for your father, or did you have any other jobs?*

No, I had other jobs. I worked for ranchers. I worked for the Capurros and I worked for Mr. Beswick at Lawton Springs and also for Sinelio whose ranch was at Chalk Bluff.

*Tell me about those jobs, because we want to get all the details.*

I used to plow for the Capurro family.

*Do you remember how much they paid you?*

Dollar a day and board, of course. And sleep in the haymow.

*You were plowing with horses?*

Oh, yes. They had the hand plow. That's before they invented the wheel plow, a 2-way plow. I worked on that, too. Also, I worked in haying for the Capurros.

*What part of Italy were the Capurros from?*

Genoa. There was quite a few from that part of Italy in the Reno area.

*Oppios, too. Were they from there?*

Yes. I think he's a Genovesi. The ranchers out there are pretty near all Genovesi. Of course, the Bellis are Swiss-Italians. Me, where I'm from, it's the province of Lombardi. Lomardia. They call it Valtellina. Right up in the Alps.

*You were saying that you went haying for the Capurros. Do you remember what they used to pay you haying?*

The same thing. Dollar a day.

*when I was in high school, I went haying for the Oppios. They used to pay us a dollar an hour then.*

A dollar an hour?

*Yes. Well, that's afterwards...2, 3 years after you quit...and the pay was better. [laughter] It still wasn't worth it. It was a lot of hard work; that's one of the hardest jobs there is. [laughter]*

I was haying...on the wagon...2, 3 pitchers pitching hay up to you and you had to spread it out.

*I was bucking bales. Those are real heavy.*

Well, this was before they baled hay; it was all stacked in big stacks with a derrick, with a jackson fork. It was hard work!

*Yes, I know. [laughter]*

You got 3 or 4 men pitching hay at you, why, and you're the only one on the wagon.

*And they don't stop if you're not ready. [laughter]*

Then I plowed with 4 horses and a walking plow. Just a kid.

*By yourself or was somebody leading the horses?*

By myself and also those horses. I had the reins right here. Four horses...2 here and 2 there. On the other side of the river down

there on the Capurro ranch there was very heavy soil. It was kind of clayey soil. They had to have 4 horses to pull that hand plow. Yes, sir. I used to walk along...had the reins over me, and I'd walk on the side with one hand.... I got so I was good at it. After they invented the wheel plow with the 2 sides, you'd go up this side and turn around and come back down... the 2-way plow they called it. Oh, man! That was really something.

*That was easy?*

Yes. I done a lot of hard work in my life. Nobody could beat me even when I went back to work in the sawmills. I could stand up with any of them at hard work.

*Were there other fellows working there, for the Capurros, too, at the same time? Or was it just you and the Capurros?*

Me and the Capurro boys, mostly. There was 3 Capurro boys. They're all gone, now. There was John and Gus and Ernest. Ernest was the youngest; he was my age.

Now, I went to school, also, at Mogul. I forgot to say that. You know that little broken-down schoolhouse that's still there?

Yes.

We used to walk from down there, in the wintertime....

*To your house?*

Yes.

*How far was it from your ranch to that schoolhouse?*

Pretty near 3 miles.

*Your father wouldn't let you take the horse?*

No, we couldn't take the horse. And our schoolteacher lived here in Verdi. Edna Bates. She used to ride from here to there on a black saddle horse. She lives down in Placerville. I'm pretty sure that she's still alive.

In August of 1916 we.. 2 of the Capurro boys—Gus and Ernest—and Ernest Avansino, that owned that ranch up there where the old school is at now, that little ranch down there and the stone house...in August of 1916 we drove to San Francisco in a Hudson Super Six.

*How'd you get the Hudson Super Six?*

The Capurro boys had some money. They also owned all of that ranch property that you can see from the park [Mayberry Park] down in back of those warehouses. They owned all of that, and they owned on across the river. They call that Indian Hill; that's going to be big development now. Then they also owned the Mayberry ranch. So they had a little money.

*I would say so, yes.*

So we were going to take a little vacation right after the wheat harvest. The wheat matures in August. So they took me along, and the first day we went and we slept on the Lincoln Highway—first highway in the United States. Up over Dog Valley and all through there. We slept just out of Truckee; that's how far we got that day. We started out late down here, but we had blankets with us and we rolled them out; slept just the other side of Truckee, before we went over Donner. Then we went over Donner, where you had to go under the railroad track. Not the U.S. 40, no. We had to go underneath the track, and there was a steep hill. If you had a Model T Ford with a gas tank under the seat, you had

to turn around and back up because it was too steep for the gas to get to your carburetor. I done that in the 1920s.

So then we drove down towards Colfax. Twelve miles or 14 miles...*great big* sign... this side of Colfax. It said, "Toot your horn. Curves. Sharp curves." And we had those kind that went, "Honk, honk!" So that day we got as far as Roseville. We stayed at Roseville that night, and the next morning we got up and drove, and we had to cross Benicia. On the other side of Benicia there's a little town; I can't think [of its name]. Well, there was no town then; I think there was only one building there, and it looked to me like it was a grocery store. Then we wound around up the hill, and we went through a tunnel— they tell me that tunnel is still there—and we looked down into Piedmont. That was the road to San Francisco.

*So it took you 2½ days to get to San Francisco?*

I don't know what time we left, probably mid to late afternoon. Then we stopped up there the other side of Truckee.

*But it took you a whole day to go from the other side of Truckee to Roseville?*

Yes. Took near the whole day, because we stayed at Roseville that night.

*Do you remember where you stayed?*

No. But in San Francisco. .ha, ha! We drove up to the St. Clark Hotel.

So here we are. We had big cowboy hats and cowboy boots and overalls; [we parked] the big Hudson Super Six...big black car, brand new. Parked it right in front on Geary Street. [The usher] come out and he was trying to...tells you how we acted. Like we were putting on something. "Stay back! We're

cowboys! We can handle them!" We walked in, and there was women in there with glasses, on the sticks....

*Yes. Looking at you? [laughter]*

Oh, man. When we went up to the counter, "Hello boys."

"Hello, there."

"Where you from?"

"We're rich men's sons, cattlemen's sons from Nevada." Out loud, Jesus. Shouldn't have talked like that. We're just as rough. And you ought to have seen those women. Man! There were several women, and were they.... Oh, didn't we put it on! [laughter]

And then we were all good dancers. Oh, man! Especially that Ernest Avansino. He was one of the playboys of Reno! All the girls wanted to dance with him. Tall, nice looking fellow. We went up to the Poodle Dog. Here we were, out there dressed up in cowboy outfits! Now, those days, they used to laugh at you if you had overalls on, see.

*What happened when you went to the Poodle Dog?*

We were dancing with the girls there. They asked us where we were from. Man, oh, man! [laughter]

*Do you remember how long you stayed down there in San Francisco?*

No, I don't remember. I don't remember too much about coming back. I don't even remember when the hell we got back. But, anyway, I know we went up [to] this dance hall on Market Street; I know that. Oh, boy. And we drove all over San Francisco.

*Had a good time?*

Oh, man. That was some automobile then. A Hudson Super Six. Yes. [laughter]

*If you did that in 1916, you'd only have been 17 years old.*

Seventeen years old.

*And they were about the same age?*

Yes. Well, the youngest, Ernest Capurro, was my age. He was just a month or 2 younger than I. Gus was only a couple years older. They're both dead. Ernest Avansino's the same age; he's dead, too. Gosh darn...yes.

We were not rough and rowdy kids. None of us were. Not because I'm saying that, but none of us were. We done a little showing off, of course, about being the....well, that car...the girls....

*Yes! That was enough of a show-off right there! [laughter]*

That was enough show right there, yes. Then when we told them we were rich cattlemen's sons, great cattlemen's sons from northern Nevada...!

You ought to've seen those....oh, what do you call those glasses?

*Monocles.*

Monocles. Oh, man! They all sitting in the lobby there. We were treated wonderful in that hotel.

*Do you remember what part of Italy the Avansino family was from?*

Genoa. We call them Genovesi.

*What other jobs did you have, other than haying for the Capurros?*

Well, I worked for Mr. Beswick, when he took over the Lawton Springs. He made it a divorcee's haven there. They used to come out there on horseback. That was a nice horseback ride for these divorcees. He rented it from the Laughton family. [Lawton, a variant of Laughton, is the name given to the springs.]

I knew the original Mr. Laughton. I used to sit and talk to him, years ago. He had, what, 3 boys: Frank, Charlie...? He leased it to this Mr. Beswick, and I worked for him. He had 2 cows, and I used to milk the cows. That's the only, those days, way you can get milk. You couldn't go to town and buy milk. They had some hogs out there. Then I used to take care of the bathhouse—go down and pick up the towels and clean the bathhouse.

*Do you remember what he used to pay you to do that?*

Forty dollars a month.

*And you'd live at home?*

No, I stayed there; I had a room there.

*Were you the only helper, or were there others working there, too?*

No, just me.

*Do you remember how long you worked at that job?*

I didn't stay there too long. Then we moved back up to Mogul. There used to be a lumberyard there at Mogul.

*Your dad sold the farm?*

Yes. My father used to work for the power company. See, the power company had a

regular crew, just like they have today, that takes care of all the canals—now even the power canals and all that—and the flumes. There's a lot of flames. They've got regular crews now, see, that that's all they do. He had a job with the flume crew or the ditch crew, whatever you want to call it. We lived there for quite a while, and then we moved back....

*Did you have any land there? Was it a house?*

There was a house there that belonged to the sawmill that was up in Robinson Canyon. It wasn't there too many years; they used to haul the lumber here to Verdi. Load it on the railroad cars to ship it, and they hauled it here with 2 bulls, 2 oxen, and 2 little white mules on the lead—S animals. They came across from Boomtown—down through the upper Belli ranch, through the old Hansen ranch, and through Boomtown, the old Christiansen ranch and came down through Verdi here. They used to haul it clean to Verdi. After that, they built a lumberyard down on that flat there at Mogul, this side of the school. Way this side of that flat where you go down to the power plant. That whole flat there was a lumberyard where they stacked the lumber.

My uncle, Jim, from Truckee, was quite a promoter, also. He used to get contracts doing this and doing that and building the stone stairways or stone houses. He wouldn't do it himself, but he'd hire the people or subcontract it. He and somebody else walked from Truckee to *here*, because those people from that sawmill wanted to put a high line—to haul the bundles of lumber on that high line from up that sawmill down there. Well, it *could* be done, but it cost too much. So my uncle, Jim...I don't know how he got a hold of it...but he and another man walked down here from *Truckee*, 20 miles or so, to look at that. Then after that, they hauled it down there and

stacked that lumber there in the flat, and they had a house there, and we lived there for quite a while.

*Were you working in the lumberyard at that time? Because if you stopped working at Lawton's and your dad got that new job and that new house up there at Mogul, what were you working at?*

I was working for these ranchers. Here when I was about 14 or 15, I worked for a fellow by the name of Sinelio for \$30 a month.

*Is that the real estate fellow in Reno?*

His father. He [the realtor] was born then. He pretty near got killed. These 2 women from Reno hit him on the bicycle.

*Hit him with a car?*

Yes. He used to ride back and forth from... you know where Chalk Bluff is at?

Yes.

Well, that ranch down there along the river was their home. Vegetable ranch.

*What part of Italy were they from?*

Genoa. They hit him, and it cost those women quite a bit of money. They kind of disfigured him a little bit, but he got his education.

*Just from the money of getting hit?*

He used that money to get his education. He turned out to be a pretty good real estate man down there in Reno.



*Yes, he's a pretty successful man. So you worked for that farm when you were 15?*

For his father, yes. I got \$30 a month, and I worked 2 months and 10 days for \$70 and stayed right there. Boy, they really made me work. I had to go home, and he didn't want to pay me because I didn't stay to the end of the season. Those days, they used to pay you the end of the season. They didn't pay every month or every week or so. He didn't want to pay me, so my father contacted the district attorney, and then he paid me.

*How come you left? Why didn't you want to stay till the end?*

He was working on the wagon and getting me, a kid, pitching the hay up to him. Early in the morning I had to get up and go help him milk cows, and if we had to use horses, I'd harness the horses and get them ready. Then we'd go have breakfast. Then we'd go out there and work all day. We'd work till we couldn't see no more out there. Then we'd come in, and we'd have to milk the cows, feed the pigs and whatever there was. Then we'd eat supper.

*That was really tough.*

They had me—just a young kid—they had me down that I couldn't stand it no more.

*Wore you out?*

Yes. While I was there...I don't think I told you about Besso family.

No.

He rented that portion the other side of Chalk Bluff, that flat. That's where the Besso

ranch was and also up on the bench where McCarran Boulevard comes over into U.S. 40.

He leased that to 2 young men from Italy as a vegetable ranch down in the flat and where his home was. They had a home up there, too. This young man paid him cash along the road one day; that was the talk. Mr. Besso was a pretty sneaky sort of operator. He says, "Oh, I'll give you a receipt." But he never did. Then one day he says to that young man—I think it was \$800—he says, "You haven't paid me."

This young man went to Reno and got advice from somebody. He was a young man from Italy, and he didn't know the laws of this country. Great big, strong, nice looking young man. He told his partner, "I'm going to Reno to see and get advice." Naturally, I don't know who he went to talk to, but they advised him that it was too bad that he had no proof. They told him that Mr. Besso was a pretty slick operator. I don't know what they actually told him, but that was the talk. So he came back, and he said to his partner, "I'm going to go up and murder that man right now."

They [Bessos] were up on the upper ditch...the upper part of the ranch...up there milking the cows. Had the cows in the barn, in the stantions, he and his son, Frank, the oldest boy. [He] was harelipped; he was about my age. They were milking the cows.

So he went up and he came to the house, first. He went in and got the guns; Frank was quite a hunter. He got the guns, and he wrapped them over around a big stone rock there. Then he set the house on fire.

*He broke the guns?*

He busted the guns and set the house on fire. Then he went over with his gun—he had a pistol—and they were milking the cows. Each

one of them was under milking the cow by hand. He said, "I'm here to kill you."

Frank, the boy, tried to stop him, but he jumped up over the hay mow and went down and called Mr. Snare—Mr. Snare was the next ranch down—to call the police. When he came back, this man had his father out in the stackyard, where they stack hay and was pounding him, still pounding him with the pistol. Frank wanted to go over to protect his father, and he says, "Stay away, Frank. I don't want to kill you." So Frank seen all of that. Well, anyway, the sheriff came up and all the deputies. Then this man hid.

*Did he kill Mr. Besso?*

He killed him.

*Where was Besso from?*

Piedmont, I think. Northern Italy.

*And the young man who killed him?*

That I don't know.

*He and a partner had the farm on lease?*

They rented. Anyway, so then we knew that he hid. But the mistake he made, he set fire to the barn and burned the cows. That's what really convicted him.

Before I get to that, Earl Thranton was a deputy. I think afterwards he ran for sheriff. They had us all looking for him, see if we could find him. We was up to the Sinelio ranch; we was all over, and then they finally found him hiding in one of the drain ditches. But they never found the pistol.

They had a man working for them; we called him Bachicha. I don't know his last name but we called him Bachicha, one of

them people that live from day-to-day—*bachicha matto*. *Matto* means crazy. I think it was the next day; I was still working for Sinelio. And here he [Bachicha] comes up with this pistol. He was half drunk because he got into the wine down at the ranch, and so Mr. Sinelio, I said to him, "Let's take that pistol away from him."

"Well," he says, "you take it. I don't want to." Mr. Sinelio wouldn't touch that pistol.

So I said, "Well, I'm going to take it." So I took the pistol, and I kept the pistol in my pocket for several hours until they came up after it.

Now, this man was arrested and had a trial and all, and he was convicted to the penitentiary. He worked up to be the overseer of the ranch crews for the prisoners. He was very, very intelligent and very well liked and all. If he hadn't've burned those cows, with the reputation that Mr. Besso had... oh... well, he'd probably got something. Anyway, I don't know how long he put over there, but he ended up missing one day, and they found him in Italy. So, they had a trial over there, and they turned him loose.

*How long ago was that?*

I can't tell you how long he put in the penitentiary over here. But he was taking care of the prison farm and all that.

*How did the people around here feel about that, when they found him in Italy, and they let him loose and all?*

Most of the people were in favor of him because Mr. Besso had a bad reputation. We had a cow one time...that's how poor some of us were...a milk cow. And he gave my father \$25 to pay something; my father was \$25 short of paying the taxes. And he took that milk cow



away from us kids. Besso. Oh, he was bad! His youngest son and his daughter are still living. It's Besso and Benetti that had the Goodyear rubber tire in Reno.

*Does she still live here in Reno?*

She's still alive. Pretty sure she is.

*What about the brother?*

The brother's there—Emery. He's a good friend of mine. Emery Besso. And her [name is] Carrie Besso.

*When you tell me their names, I find that a little strange. Was their mother, Mr. Besso's wife, Italian? Because Emery and Carrie are very unusual names for an Italian family to have, unless maybe they changed their names. Maybe it was something like Emetettio or something like that?*

No. Her grandmother lived on Nevada Street, and she lived to be close to 100. Mrs. Besso was a highly educated person to marry a man like Besso. She very seldom stayed on the ranch; she most of the time lived right on Nevada Street.

*Was she Italian, too?*

Oh, yes. She was Italian.

*Was she born in this country or born in Italy?*

I think she was born here. I'm not sure but I think so, with the schooling that she had. If you ever had schooling those days, especially being a foreigner, or even not only that but people didn't have the schooling that they have today or even 40 years ago.

*That's an interesting story.*

Yes. Now, Frank died—the harelipped boy. Emery is still alive and I'm pretty sure Carrie is still alive. Her son has that Goodyear tire company in Reno. They have 2 distributing spots. And Benetti, another. He was well-known, the young man. And his father, Menante, was a very well-known man, too. You could talk to them, especially Menante. He was quite active in everything in Reno, yes.

*Is he still alive?*

Yes. I'm pretty sure. But Besso...well, look at the trick he pulled.

*That's a terrible thing to do to somebody that comes along and works real hard.*

And he was well-liked by everybody.

*The young man or Besso?*

The fellow that killed him. He was a young man, nice looking, great big husky fellow.

*Was Besso well-liked?*

No, not Besso. Besso was a *horse* trader, as we used to call them years ago. So look out for a horse trader because he'd cheat you out of anything. He had that bad reputation with most everybody.

*Was that pretty unusual amongst the Italians, to cheat each other?*

No, sir. That was very rare.

*He was just a bad apple?*

Just a bad apple. Well, we have them today.

Now, another thing. You know that solid stone house that's built up on Chalk Bluff?

Yes.

Well, I hauled every rock off of that hill up there.

*To that house?*

Built that. A fellow by the name of Kibble had a roofing business in Reno. He paid to build that house; he owned it. That was Besso property, also. Up on top, there's a little meadow up there; he bought it from Besso. And Besso didn't pull nothing on that fellow because Kibble was a pretty slick boy himself, yes. I hauled every stone off of that.

*How old would you have been then?*

I was in my teens.

*Just you, or did somebody help you with it?*

I had 2 horses on a stoneboat. Do you know what a stoneboat is?

No.

It's a sled on the dirt.

*Oh, just drag it?*

Drag it on the dirt. Had a runner here and a runner here. And the 2 horses. I was up there on that hillside; this man would go up and chisel and cut those rocks the way he wanted them. Then I'd go up there with the crowbars and roll them on the stoneboat and then drive the horses down there. Then I'd also come down to Reno to get the sand for the cement, with 4 horses. You've seen that road, haven't you, that goes up the hill?

Yes.

I was just a kid.

*How far were you bringing those stones from?*

Oh, way up on that hillside. We'd cross the canal... there's the Highland Ditch comes right above his property. That's how he gets the water to irrigate up on that bench. There's granite rocks all over that hill. I done all of that just with....

*Were there a lot of rattlesnakes in there then when you were doing that?*

Yes, there's rattlesnakes all over up there. But of course, us ranchers, we're not afraid of rattlesnakes.

*You're not afraid of them?*

Hell, no.

*Do you remember how long you worked for Mr. Kibble doing that?*

Oh, I worked for him couple of months, I guess.

*Do you remember what he paid you for that?*

Yes, I think he didn't pay me very much. He paid me the board and all: He give me \$15 or \$20, something like that; that was a lot of money, those days. And I used to stay at home, and I'd ride back and forth on my saddle horse.

*Stay at your house with your father?*

With my father.

*And that was when your father had that little farm in there that was below...?*

That little ranch...12 acres, I think.

Now, let me see...,how do I get to Wadsworth? Because I drove a team of horses [with] some horses tied on behind the wagon. It took me all day from early in the morning till way in the dark at night to drive the team to Wadsworth. When did I go down there? It was down there when I got the greetings from President Wilson.

*So you went down to Wadsworth. What were you going to do down there?*

I was working for the Albee family.

*Where were they from?*

They had this power company ranch here, originally.

*Here in Verdi?*

Here in Verdi. Then they got the Pierson ranch in Wadsworth. They bought that.

*Do you know where the Albee family was from originally? Were they from Italy?*

No. Mrs. Albee was a widow, and there was 3 boys and 1 girl: Rita; and Ray, the eldest; and Delbert and the young boy, I forget...I think he's dead, too. Delbert ended up being a railroader.

*Out there by Winnemucca?*

No. In Wadsworth.

*Well, I went to school with an Albee girl, and they were living out there about 30 miles this side of Winnemucca at Imlay, that little railroad place. It's still there and they're probably still there, too, maybe. Anyway, you went down there to work on this ranch?*

For a dollar a day.

*Why did you leave this job up here to go down there for a dollar a day?*

I went down there for a dollar a day because this was too much for me.

*Too hard?*

Oh, sakes. Now, wait a minute. was I down there before I was here? I worked *all* the time. I was bringing money to the family all the time. Never, never was I laid off at any time. I never got fired in my life. We had this ranch over here, too, that the Albees had. But that was afterwards; that was later on.

*How'd you get that job with them? Did they send for you?*

Well, they were here on this ranch. Ray Albee hired me right now, because I was good with horses, animals. In fact, I used to break horses to work, saddle horses and all. Then in Wadsworth I worked on the ranch; I rode saddle horses, too, because they had cattle up at Olinghouse. They had cattle up in those mountains, and I used to break saddle horses and all that and then ride up in the mountains after the cattle.

Then I drove a team of horses and mules with a wagon that we hauled lava rock off of those lava hills the other side of Fernley, on the road to Lovelock before it was declared the Lincoln Highway—first highway in the United States. The few automobiles that came from Lovelock or went to Lovelock and back... it was very seldom you'd seen one. Sometimes they'd have trouble going through those sand dunes there.

So we were hauling that lava rock from up there down to this supposed-to-be Lincoln

Highway and dumping that lava rock. They had a big steamroller there; I don't know who the steamroller belonged to—probably the highway department. They'd roll that lava rock into the sand to make a foundation for the highway.

*Did you do that for very long?*

Oh, not too long. Maybe a month or so.

*You and Albee together?*

Me and Albee and a fellow by the name of Herman Baker.

*Just by yourselves? You weren't working for Albee then?*

Yes. We were working for Albee.

*He sent you over there to do that?*

Yes, but we used to drive the horses back and forth from the ranch over there because it's only 3 or 4 miles. After that, Ray Albee had an uncle that was a county commissioner down in Fallon—had a big ranch down there—and he got a contract hauling baled hay to the railroad. Me and Herman Baker... Herman Baker was a rancher down the other side of Sparks. He and his partner's still alive; they started a taxi business in Reno. Well, anyway we started hauling this baled hay. I was driving Albee's teams and horses and 2 wagons. We'd load these wagons—baled hay—and haul them to the railroad and then stack this hay in the box cars, ourselves.

*Where did you haul it to?*

We hauled it to the railroad station in Fallon.

*How far were you hauling it most of the time?*

Well, that depends. One ranch would be maybe 2 miles, the next one'd be 3, 4 miles. Go from one to the other. And we were getting a dollar and a half a day, besides taking care of all of those horses, too...watering them and harnessing them and hitching them up and driving them and then load the hay *ourselves* and unload it.

*Who was paying you?*

Ray Albee.

*Oh, he was the contractor?*

Yes, he was a contractor.

*But he'd send you 2 down to go do it?*

And Herman Baker, he wouldn't do it no more; he wanted \$2 a day. So the man that hired him—that rancher, that commissioner—he gave him \$2. Finally, I said to Ray Albee, "Listen. If he's worth \$2, I'm worth \$2, too. So you better pay me \$2, or if you don't, I'm going to go home." Two dollars a day and get up early in the morning and water those horses and feed those horses and harness those horses and then go in and have breakfast! Of course, we got our food and everything.

*Where did you stay?*

We stayed on the ranch, right below Fallon. Oh, what was...he was one of the well-known people of Fallon. He had 2 beautiful daughters; maybe that's why we, Herman Baker and I, stayed there! Williams! Williams was his name.

*How long did you stay down there on that job?*

Well, I must've stayed down there pretty near a year, I guess. Now, wait a minute. I got that mixed up a little bit; I think that's where I got my greetings. I was down there someplace when President Wilson sent me my greetings. My sister wrote me a letter about the greetings from President Wilson, because I became 18 years old in 1917. Right after that's when I moved back up here to Verdi.

*So you moved back up from Fallon to Verdi?*

Yes.

*And you went back to live with your father again?*

Oh, yes.

*What did you do then?*

Oh, I worked everywhere.

*Was that about 1918, 1919? Or 1917?*

I worked in the sawmill [in] 1917, 15 hours a day. Then I worked up on the mountain of that sawmill. I also worked for the ditch company.

*What were you doing for the ditch company?*

In the wintertime, we were fighting ice.

*That was right after you came back from Wadsworth?*

Yes. I was doing that. Then in the summer we would clean the ditch...with a pick and a shovel on your back and your lunch bucket. We used to walk to all of those places. The only man that rode when we went up as far as Farad, which is the power plant on the state

line, [was] Mr. Harker, the Harker and Harker brothers' father. He was the foreman, and he had a tricycle; It was a bicycle, and he made a tricycle out of it that he used to ride the rails. Two wheels with clamps, whatever you want to call them, and then the third wheel over here, and they'd fit on the track. He was quite an engineer. He'd get on that bicycle and he used to ride...and the railroad company got after him.

*They didn't want him to do that?*

No. But he used to ride that. It stayed on the track, and he'd just peddle it up, when most of us had to walk.

*You were working for the ditch company at that time?*

Yes.

*Do you remember how long you worked for the ditch company?*

No, I don't. I guess I worked a couple of years altogether, off and on...not steady.

*Were you living at home with your parents?*

Yes.

*You said you went back to the lumber mill during the war.*

Yes.

*That would've been about the time, wouldn't've it?*

That's just about what I done, is went back to working in the sawmill. My brother was a setter—the man that's on the carriage

that has the log on it, that's worked back and forth. He was a setter and he has a dial here, and the sawyer is over here that runs that carriage. He gives the setter the sign...the thickness of those boards that he wants...because he's looking at the log, and he's grading the logs. He gives the setter the sign that we want 1½ or 2 inch or what thickness. Also he can tell him what width he should leave that chunk of wood so they could cut 1-by-12s or 2-by-12s or whatever it is.

My brother would work from 6:00 in the morning until 12:00 at night—15 hours. Then I'd go on at 12:00 at night, because then I was using the horse to distribute the trucks. See, they sorted the boards—certain boards went on this truck, certain boards went on this truck. That is, they were 4-wheeled on railroad cars. Then when so much lumber got on that truck, why, it had to be taken out to where they were going to stack it so it could dry. Well, I drove that horse. No, wait a minute. He used to work till 12:00 at night, and then I'd go on at 12:00 and work all day with the horse. I only slept 4, 5 hours. We done that all during the war, my brother and I. Fifteen hours a day, 6 days a week.

*Which lumberyard was that?*

Right here. The Verdi Lumber Company.

*But you were living at Mogul? And you'd come up to Verdi to work?*

Yes. Then afterwards, as soon as we could, we moved back to Verdi here. Where did we move to? Oh, we moved to a little house that's down there about where the post office is now. There used to be 2 homes there; we lived there in that house.

*When you were working in the lumber mill during the war, were you staying at Mogul, or were you staying here in Verdi?*

We were living here.

*What was your dad doing then?*

Pops worked for the power company or the ditch company, whatever you want to call them.

*Did he buy that house, or were you renting it?*

No, we were just renting the house.

*But did he have any land? Did he try to have vegetables, too, then?*

No.

*So he pretty much got out of the ranching business?*

Yes. Pretty much got out of the ranching business at that time.

*Just stayed with the power company?*

Yes. Mostly.

*Then what happened? You were working here and the war came along, and you worked real hard. Then you almost got drafted.*

Well, no. Now wait a minute. I worked in a sawmill up at the first summit of Dog valley... the old Bony and Jackman mill. I drove the horses to go get water over at a spring because there was no water there. Bony was the hotel man, and Jackman used to do a lot of road and construction work. Of course, it was all horses, those days. I drove a tank made out of



boards—tongue and groove tank, the whole long bed of the wagon. I'd go out there [to] this spring. I had a V flume—board—about 16 foot long, and I'd put it in the creek and that's how I would fill the tank. Then I'd drive the horses over there to the sawmill; it was a steam-operated sawmill.

*Oh, so you had to keep the thing full of water?*

They had to have the water for the boiler.

*So it was a pretty important job.*

Oh, yes.

*How far did you have to go for the water?*

About a mile. [It was a] natural spring and the coldest water in those hills. Came right out of the hillside alongside the road.

Then they would load the wagon with the boards, and I would hitch the horses onto the wagon and haul that load of lumber clean down to the Jackman home up here the other side of the firehouse, pretty near right across from the school.

*How far of a trip was that?*

From the top of Dog Valley Grade—first summit—around about 4 or 5 miles. Then I'd go over and work on the green chain at the sawmill at night.

*Do you remember what kind of money you were making doing that?*

Two seventy, I think, a day. Ten hours. Well, I don't know how much Jackman was paying me, but the green chain was paying me...that was the best paid position in the sawmill.

*Jackman was paying you something, too, so you were making pretty good money, really, between the 2 jobs?*

Yes.

*Were you still giving your money to your mother or were you keeping it?*

Oh, yes. Money all went to my mother.

Did I tell you when I went over to Loyalton?

*You mean with the vegetables?*

No, no.

*No, you didn't tell me about that.*

That was in 1919. Me and a fellow by the name of Steve Stefani. In about October, we went over there with a 1912 Buick Roadster. They had Prest-O-Lite tank on the side, and the only lights that you had, you had to turn on the presser, the tank. It was on the running board. Then you had to open the front shield of the headlight and strike a match—one here and one over there—and you couldn't see from here to there. That was the lights on the Buick. We went over Dog Valley Grade 28 miles to Loyalton.

*You went over there to work?*

Went over there. The man that was the superintendent here went over there to C. D. Terwilliger. Before that he was a county commissioner in Reno, also. He bought a closed-down sawmill over there, so he asked us to go over there and help him repair that mill. I really stayed over there until 1925. That is, as soon as it stormed, that was the end of the sawmill.

Christmas Day, 1919, it started snowing and we had to shut the mill down. So, naturally, here I'm going to come home. We came home with a fellow by the name of Lund and this Steve Stefani. He's in Italy now. He came here 2, 3 years ago, by golly, and he looked good. He went back there and married; he had a family and everything. I don't know if he's still alive or not.

But anyway, we started out from Loyalton. . . snowing pitchforks. He and I and this fellow by the name of Lund...he was a carpenter. I think he must be dead now. One of his brothers was even a fireman; I was his brother's captain in the fire department. All right. And a young lady that was married to a fireman on the logging train. We started out in this old 1912 Oakland. We were coming along by the old Evans ranch. You remember the story about old Edith Evans, the cowgirl from over there?

No.

You never heard...? Oh, she was a wild and wooly cowgirl, boy. Yes...the old Evans stage station. Between there and a little depot that was the Nevada-California-Oregon railroad, just a little bit past the Evans ranch, there was about a foot of snow, see. And we were coming along, plugging along. We was going to make it to Reno. There's a little station there; they called it Purdy[s]. In between that we'd hit a chuckhole and *snapped* off the right spindle! [laughter]

Now, what the hell we going to do with it? Go back to the Evans ranch; we were stuck. But we knew that the train was going to come this way. So we started walking back to the Evans [ranch]. We were all dressed up in our go-to-meeting clothes, and this gal had on the kind of shoes that women got on. Jesus Christ! Here she started walking in that foot of snow, and so I got her on my back, piggyback—me,

a young fellow. I was 20 years old—big, strong, husky guy. I got her on my back here, and, by God, I packed her over to the Evans house. And Mother Evans, when we knocked on the door, she didn't want to leave us in; she was a rough old gal. [laughter] So we told her this and that.

So the kitchen stove—that's the only heat they had in the house. Frank Evans, the boy, was down in the barn doing something—feeding the horses or something. So we got around this stove, and that gal took her shoes off, and we warmed up. Then we hollered at Frank, so he came up. And he said, "Yes, I'll hitch up the wagon,"—the 2 horses and the wagon—"because he said, "the train is going to come and I'll take you up to the Purdy station." The Purdy station is just maybe a mile or so from Bordertown. So we got on this wagon and away we went...still *snowing!* We got over there, and he gave us a lantern, see. And he says, "When the train comes, just blow the lantern out if you can and just leave it there in the station, and I'll pick it up."

So here we are. We had to wait quite a while. Jesus, colder than hell and snowing. And we didn't have winter clothes on. And here comes this [imitates the train whistle]. M a n , and the flakes all coming down; you could hardly see! When he came by the platform he went [imitates brakes of train and whistle]. He heard us, and he seen us. We got on that train, and I kind of had an argument with a Mexican follow in there. Those seats were all taken, and I says, "Can't you let the lady sit down? She's all wet and everything else. Why don't you let her sit down?" I said, "Get out, get out of there!" You know me. I was big shot—a woman.... We had a hell of a time getting to Reno...the train did. It was bucking that snow around the base of Peavine. When we got into Reno, there was about a foot of snow in Reno!



Did I tell you about that I knew [John] Squiers, one of the train robbers?

No.

The first train robbery in the West was done right here, [5 November 1870].

*Here in Verdi?*

Yes. They unhooked a train...a baggage car or 2. They made the engineer and train crew go down as far as Mogul.

They had it wrong, the history that you read. It's Hogan Canyon, because down there at Mogul there was a canyon up there to the left. The Hogan Canyon water runs through Dr. Hogan's ranch, and that would be right there at Mogul. They got it wrong; they had it Hunter Creek. Well, Hunter Creek's down Mayberry, on that side.

*Yes. That's quite a ways down, on the other side of the river.*

They had it all wrong.

*So what happened? They made them uncouple a train here, and then they made them take the engine to Mogul?*

Then they got off the train with the money and... because Mr. Laughton that started Lawton Springs, which is called River Inn now, used to tell me all about it. He used to go up there because they were supposed to hide some of that money up there.

*Oh, those train robbers hid the money up there somewhere?*

Well, that was the talk. And he used to tell me that he went all over up there in those

rocks and everywhere trying to find some money. Yes, he was a great man, with long whiskers down to here. This was in 1912, 1913. He was telling me all about it.

*But what about the train robbery? You said you knew one of the train robbers.*

Yes. Squiers. He lived in Sierraville, Sierra County, California.

*Yes, up in the mountains.*

I was there in 1919, and they pointed him out to me that that was one of.... Squiers had a brother in Loyalton— they had a little garage there, when they started these garages. I said hello to him, and he hardly would talk to anybody because I think he spent so many years in prison. He must have been 70 or 80 years old.

*He was an old man then?*

Well, the robbery was in 1870. He was 20 years old or so when he robbed the train. When I saw him in Sierraville in 1919 he was about 70 years old. He's the [robber] that said, "Hi, there." They said, "You know who that is? He was one of the train robbers." Yes.

Did I tell you about that grandma over there, one of her [brothers] was killed over a line fence? It was one of the Roberts. I think one of the Roberts was also in with the train robbery here. I'm not sure. But Mrs. Evans—not the Frank and his sister, Edith Evans, but their mother—had one of her [brothers] killed arguing over a dividing fence, a fence line out there, with one of the Roberts brothers. Now that was one of the train robbers here. That's why I wanted to bring that up. One of those Roberts even worked for me in the sawmills for a while. That is, I think that was one, because I'd ask him about that, and he'd...

*Wouldn't want to talk about it?*

No. He must have been one of the nephews or sons or something.

*You worked there in Loyalton about 6 years, then?*

Yes, but I used to just work in the summertime. Then in the winter, I'd go down to Stockton down there to dance with the girls!

*Just to dance with the girls, or did you go down to work, too? [laughter]*

Well, 2 uncles and one aunt lived there... and cousins. My father's 2 elderly brothers lived down there; they had moved from up in this country down there. I used to go down there and spend the winter there—that is, 2 or 3 months, most of the time.

*What kind of work did you do in the sawmill in Loyalton?*

I had a contract there. I made money.

*What was the contract?*

I, the young fellow, had a crew of men, and I used to have \$2,000 and \$3,000 down [in] the Italian Bank of Italy in Stockton. I shipped the money down there.

*What kind of work were you doing?*

I was in the sawmill part, distributing the lumber that came out of the sawmill.

*Why did you send the money to Stockton?*

Well, because that's where I was going to spend the winter. There was a lot of Italian

girls down there. They wanted me to marry some of them, and oh, no, I didn't. I stayed there all winter; I'd stay there 2 or 3 months until it was ready for the mill to start up again. See, the sawmills then, they never decked any logs. As soon as the weather set in, why, that was the end of the sawmill.

*You said you had family who were living in Stockton?*

My uncle Joe and my oldest uncle, too, went down to Stockton.

*He and his wife moved down there?*

Yes.

*Did they move down at the same time?*

Joe moved down there before. And Joe married Rosa. She was a young woman from Milano, Italy. That's still northern Italian.

*Did he meet her here or over there?*

He met her here, I'm pretty sure. She was the mother of 2 girls; the girls are still living—my cousins—and one boy. The boy died when he was young, and he is buried in the same grave [where] my little sister's buried up in Truckee—the one that got killed.

*Your uncle Joe married here in the United States?*

Yes.

*And he was working as a stonemason and as a charcoal burner around Truckee, and then he decided to go down to Stockton?*

To Stockton.

*What did he do down there, Joe?*

He was working in these canneries. There was a lot of canneries years ago where they used to can fruit and vegetables and everything like that. He ended up over at Oakdale with a vineyard. That's where he passed away. It was in a vineyard because I know one year—that would be about the 1950s, I think— we went down. We got a truckload of some of the grapes to make the wine up here. With my own truck.

*What about his daughters? Did they get married?*

Yes. His oldest daughter has got a son that comes up here to see us every now and then. They have 2, 3 children— highly educated— and his wife is from way back in Cincinnati or someplace. Very nice woman.

Oh, man, I'll tell you, I've got so many relatives down there! The other girl is Lena. She married a fellow by the name of Circhi. Then Mary was married, too. She is the mother of 2 girls. I think she divorced him.

*Was he an Italian fellow?*

No. He was a Spaniard. She's married now to a Portuguese boy, Cinnabar. They live down in a little town down around by San Jose or somewhere down in there.

*What about Jim? When did he move down there to Stockton? You say he moved down after Joe did?*

Yes.

*He sold his place up here in Truckee and moved down there?*

Yes. He sold it to the Sala brothers.

*What did he do when he went down to Stockton?*

Well, he had a little vineyard down there. He was supposed to make 200 gallons of wine for he and his wife, but I think he peddled some of it.

*Oh, yes? [laughter] Why do you think so?*

Well, he didn't drink.

*But he was still making 200 gallons of wine! [laughter]*

Yes. What was he doing with that grapes? He made wine out of it. What was he doing with the wine? See? Because my aunt Rosa, one of her brothers was quite an influential one of the high boys of Stockton. He had a taxi stand, and he knew what was going on.

*Well, didn't your uncle Jim eventually get a bar or a saloon or something down there in Stockton? Didn't you tell me that at one time?*

He had a little place, yes. It was a little place of relaxation and the like. Right on Linden Road. I'll never forget that.

*But he pretty much lived down in Stockton, or did he leave Stockton and come back up here?*

No. He lived down there.

*Stayed there until he died?*

Yes. He was quite a promoter.

*What were the things that he promoted down there in Stockton?*

He promoted in selling property—real estate—and things like that. Anytime there was any money to be made, why, he was right there.

*So he knew what he was doing?*

Even in Truckee the people looked upon him as a kind of a leader. Him and Mr. Besio, also. Mr. Besio was very smart man.

Then the Borsi brothers had a big contract hauling the wood for the paper company to Floriston. They hired lots of people and they had a lot of horses. Everything was done with horse and wagon to haul the wood. They ended up with this ranch down in here, down next to the Hunter Creek reservoir. They owned all that flat up there. And Borsi had 2 sons. I think they were graduates of the university here. They took off and went back to Grosio, the whole family.... Never heard no more about it.

*Was that very common? Did many of the people from Grosio go back to live, or did most of them just stay here after they came?*

Most of them stayed here. My cousin, Christopher Pini, went back and married and started a family, and he died, too. He was the one that was with me on that contract over there in Loyaltan. That's why I took him in with me, so he could make a bunch of money because he wanted to leave. He wanted to go over there and marry. We heard from him when he married. He left here in about 1923, maybe 1924.

*Did your father have any more brothers and sisters other than Jim and Joe?*

He had a sister in Italy. There's 3 boys and one girl.

*She didn't leave ever? She just stayed right there in Grosio?*

Well, this Pini here, that was his mother.

*Oh, this woman was Christopher Pini's mother?*

Yes.

*Did just one Pini boy come, or did more come?*

No, just this one. He came here as a young man in 1911. I'll tell you why he came here. He was quite a singer. He was over in Switzerland working, building. Most of the people from the town of Grosio, when they went out they didn't have their job in Grosio. They went to Switzerland, and they were all stonemasons because that's all the buildings are over there. So he was in a group that sang, and maybe I shouldn't say this but I will. [laughter] Something happened with he and somebody, so he kind of hurt a priest. I think he used his fisticuffs on a priest.

*Oh, really! [laughter]*

Because he was quite a strong, husky character—afraid of nothing. And he had to take off. That's how he landed here in Verdi.

*Did he come here because he had relatives here? Did he come to your family?*

Yes. He came right to us here. He got off the train right here in Verdi. He was highly talented. Oh, what a voice he had. He even had us singing. I had a good tenor voice myself.

And there was something happened in Switzerland. He belonged to this.. what would they call this group?

*Choir?*

A choir, yes. And something happened... he hurt a priest. Not too bad, but he hurt him. That's absolutely...priest over there were looked upon in a....

*Yes, really. So it was a serious matter to hurt a priest.*

Yes. So he got off the train right here as they were building that power canal—1911—and he got the job with the steam shovel. They had the 2 arms that stick out like this with screws here, see, to keep the steam shovel from tipping.

Yes.

Well, he was one of them. He got a job to be one of those—one on one side and one on the other side. He was quite a good worker.

*He didn't stay, though?*

Well, he left in about 1923. That's 12 years, something like that.

What happened, they also ended up down in Sparks. He and Besio were great friends. I wonder if he was also a distant relative. He and Besio ended up owning one of the hotels down there, one of them little old Italian hotels. What did they call that hotel? I think the buildings are still there. One of them married a girl from Wadsworth. That ranch belonged to the university—that little ranch down below Wadsworth—Capurro!

*But Christopher Pini had a hotel there? There were some Italian hotels in Sparks?*

Yes. There were quite a few Italians in Sparks working for the railroad—in the machine shops and then on the railroad. There's still quite a few Italians down there.

*Let's get back to your being in Stockton. When you would go to Stockton, did you work at all?*

No.

*Just took it easy down there?*

Just took it easy. I had *silk shirts* with my initials on the sleeve here and a John B. Stetson velour hat. Oh, yes. I even had one of the fathers of the girls chase me one time. He didn't want me to walk his daughter to their home. He even took after me. I wouldn't start no trouble; I just took off.

*[laughter] So you were real popular with the girls down there?*

Oh, yes. Girls like a fellow that knows how to dance, and then they like that money, too. You take them to the theaters, and you take them here and you take...they like that.

*Where did you used to go to dance in Stockton?*

Oh, all over. There was a lot of Italian... you'd be surprised. Stockton was owned—I'm just making a guess—I'd say 80 percent of Italians. And most of the ranchers were Italians.

I had an uncle down there that was quite an operator. He had a taxi stand business, and he was quite an upcoming, recognized person in Stockton. He used to come and get me and take me out to these ranches.

See, the home, then, had a full basement, most of those ranchers down there. Well, Saturday night or Sunday night—I don't remember—here they'd put on a big feed, and all the ranchers around would be invited. All the families and all the small children—everybody—would be there. They had barrels of wine on that side, and barrels of wine on

this side, and here was accordion players there. And all the mamas were there, and all the girls were there. So he came after me one time; there was one girl that he wanted me to.... Well, that's why he came after me, to take me out to this place and introduce me to this girl. But before I got down in the basement, upstairs we were playing *mora*. Ever hear of playing that with the fingers?

*Oh, yes!*

So I was in it, too. They got me in it. I could see this woman looking at me, and he says, "Come on down here." so he got me down in the basement. And so here're the accordion players; they always had 2 or 3 accordion players. Most of the Italians all play the accordion. Then he introduced me to this girl, see.

Well, she was a beautiful girl...nice...so I used to take her to dances. Then all she got to talking about was marriage, marriage, marriage. Well, here.. .you know how I felt? I'll tell you the truth: she was a wonderful girl, beautiful. Nice family and everything. And I felt, *why me?* A lumberjack, as we called us, up there in the mountains, and they had 2, 3 big businesses in Stockton, and they owned I don't know how many ranches and the grocery and vegetable market—they owned most of that, where the ranchers used to come to sell their vegetables. I couldn't see it.

I got ahead of my story there a little bit. Those ranchers, this Sunday they'd have it here, the next Sunday they'd have it over there, the next Sunday...that was the entertainment. And it didn't cost you anything. Everybody'd get together and cook the food; you ought to see what feeds they put on—oh, man!

But, anyway, this girl, that's all she could talk about— getting married. I took her home from the show about 10:30 this

one time, and I got on the Western Pacific train about 11:00, and I headed for Loyalton, California.

*Did you tell her you were leaving?*

No! I just took off. I got letter after letter after letter, and I never answered because I figured she was out of my class. That's just the way I felt. And people laugh at me. "No," I said. "She was just out of my class." And I knew her brother; her brother had a Moon automobile. He liked me— the whole *family* liked me! Well, here I am, a lumberjack up there, marrying a wealthy man's daughter? No, I couldn't see it.

*So you never did answer the letters?*

No, never.

*Well, what about when you went back down to Stockton the next year?*

Well, I went down there, but I stayed away from.... There were 2 or 3 girls there. There was another girl that her father is the one that took after me, and she wrote me a letter that had, what, 19 pages? I forget now. Then there was another rancher's daughter that she'd married a fellow at Lodi afterwards. I told her, I says, "No, I don't want to get married." But there was lots of Italian people there.

*And all the girls wanted to get married?*

Yes. Well, they were of age, and then I was a good dresser, and I was a hell of a one-stepper! Oh, man!

*[laughter] What about when you were out in Loyalton? Tell me more about that contract and how that worked because you were there*



*for what, 6 years? You said you were there from 1919 till about 1925.*

Well, 1919, and I left in 1925.

*But how did that contract in Loyalton work?*

That contract...I got so much a thousand board feet. Here is the sawmill, see. It was a timber mill, and we changed it over to a lumber mill. It could also saw timbers if you wanted. It was 2 storey. And here [was] this chain, see. The boards'd come down here like this, and then there's another chain here and a *long* table, 200 feet long. Three chains— one chain over there, one here and one here. And there was a grader—a man walking on top of these boards as they come down off of the mill.

*He'd walk right on them while they were moving?*

He was walking on them, and he had a measuring stick and a stick with chalk on the end of it. He'd be walking on these boards, *grading* that lumber. Number one, number 2, number 3—whatever it was. Then here we had a row of trucks on rails. One certain mark went on this truck, the other mark went on this truck, the other mark went on that truck, and all this and that. I had 7 men, and I paid those men 70¢ an hour. That was *big* money those days; that was the biggest money there.

*Did you have a partner?*

Yes, I ended up having a partner because then we had the night shift.

*He'd take one shift, and you'd take the other?*

I'd take the other shift, yes.

*Who was your partner?*

Rocco Tortorola was one, and Christopher Pini—Cristoforo Pini—was my first cousin that was here from Italy. He came here in 1911, as a young man. He was working in Switzerland. That's right over from where we were born. He had a crooked neck; he was born with [it]. Those days they could've operated on him, but they.... And here he was; we called him *Testastorta*. *Testa....*

*Yes, bent head. [laughter]*

Bent head, yes. We had a contract, and we were getting 35¢ a thousand board feet, I think. We made big money! And we were paying those men; that was the best paid job there in the whole operation. Of course, the lumber pilers made more money because they were stacking the lumber after we hauled it out in the yard. They made big money, too. But everybody wanted my job—that is, wanted to work for me—because they'd make \$7 a day...70¢ an hour. That was a lot of money.

*Yes, really. So you were in partners with your cousin, Pini. Was he your first partner?*

Yes. Then Rocco Tortorola. He was from Verdi here. He ended up being a partner of mine, too.

*Why did you change partners?*

Because my cousin Pini went to Italy. Went back home.

*How long were you in partners together up there?*

Oh, 4 years.



*Was he from the same village that you were from?*

Grosio, yes. His mother was my mother's sister. She married a fellow by the name of Pini. There's quite a few Pinis over in Italy.

*Was he older than you or about the same age?*

No, he's older than I.

*When you first went up to Loyalton, was that your first job, or did you work in the mill for a while and then you got a chance for that job or for that contract?*

No, I worked for the mill. We worked in the mill from October until December. We started the mill; it took us pretty near 2 months to get the mill in operation.

*You went up to be part of starting up the mill?*

I went up to rebuild, to reactivate [it] from a timber mill to a lumber mill. We had to modify it, in other words. I was pretty good at it, even what I learned here. That's why Mr. Terwilliger called me and asked me to bring somebody over there with me.

Wait a minute now, there's Steve Stefani. He was also in partners with me at first.

*He was your first partner, then?*

Yes, Steve Stefani, Christopher Pini and then Rocco Tortorola.

*How did you know Stefani?*

He was here—Verdi.

*You grew up with him here?*

Well, he was here from Italy. Yes, I grew up here with him.

*How old was he when he came over?*

I don't know how old he was, but he was quite a bit older than I when we went over there. He and I drove over there in this 1912 Buick.

*Was that your Buick or his Buick?*

I don't remember who it belonged to. When we left there Christmas Day, 1919, when we closed the mill down and it snowed—that was the end of the sawmill—I rode over...to where we got stuck up there.. .with a fellow by the name of Lund. He was over there as a carpenter from Reno—there's a Lund family in Reno; I knew them very well. He had an Oakland automobile; I don't know what happened to the Buick, whether somebody got it over there or something.

*Was Steve Stefani from northern Italy, too?*

Tuscany. Toscano.

*Joe, up until now you told me about the different jobs you had and how you always used to take your money home and give it to your mother. When did you stop taking your money home? You just got done saying that you used to send your money to the Bank of Italy in Stockton, so you weren't giving it to your mother, then?*

No.

*When you worked down at Wadsworth did you send your money to your mother?*

Yes. Most of *all* my life I gave my money to my people. The only time that I had that

down there was when I was working up there in Loyalton. Then from Stockton, I brought them back up to Loyalton. Understand? With my money.

*You brought who back up?*

My father and mother. Back up to Loyalton. See, they were in Stockton for a while.

*Oh, they moved down to Stockton?*

When we moved from here, we moved them to Stockton, me and my brothers.

*Were they getting older?*

Well, they wanted to live down there with his brothers.

*And you were living in Loyalton at the time?*

Yes. We even loaded the horses here and loaded potatoes here, and we loaded all the household...everything in boxcars and shipped them down there, cow and dogs and everything. We got a little criticism about shipping potatoes down there from the railroad.

*Why?*

Well, here we are shipping edible food down to where they grow a lot of it.

*They didn't think it made much sense?*

Politics, you know. It was business. They didn't even want us to unload those potatoes down there. We had a heck of a time.

*Why did you want to send potatoes down there?*

Well, we couldn't sell them here.

*Oh, you were going to sell them down there?*

Sure, we were going to sell them down there. Nice Nevada potatoes.

*They were popular?*

Yes.

*What year was that when you moved your parents down there?*

Let me see. I was up here...it had to be in the late teens. I helped them. Then we moved them up there with my money. My 2 younger brothers went to school in Loyalton.

*You moved your whole family up to Loyalton?*

Oh, yes.

*So in the late teens your family went down to Stockton, and you went with Stefani up to Loyalton and got this contract up there?*

Yes.

*When was it you moved your parents back up there?*

It was in the 1920s.

*How long did they live in Stockton?*

Oh, 2 or 3 years, not very long.

*Why did they want to leave Stockton?*

Well, there was nothing for them to do there. I had to still take care of my people, so I moved them up there. didn't want to take

care of them just down there. My dad ended up down there working; he'd work in these orchards here and there and everywhere, and then he ended up working for a junk dealer. Had a job with him for quite a while. I didn't want him to work there, so I told him...and especially my mother...I says, "Come on up. Live up here." So they lived in Loyalton 2 or 3 years, something like that.

*And you brought your brothers up, too?*

Yes. Both Jim—Jim is still alive—and my youngest brother, Henry, was the judge here. Both of them went to school in Loyalton.

*Did they stay in Loyalton those winters that you'd go back down to Stockton?*

Yes.

*They'd stay up there all year?*

Yes.

*They wouldn't go to Stockton with you?*

No. They stayed there.

*Would you stay with your folks in Stockton when you'd go down those winters?*

Yes. Either stay with them or stay with my uncle Jim, my father's eldest brother, or even Uncle Joe. They all lived close together. My uncle Jim was the smart one of the family. He had a bar.

*Right in Stockton itself?*

Right in Stockton. And then my uncle Joe had a orchard. He ended up over in a little town out of Stockton.. .Oakdale.

After that, in 1925 or 1926, we moved from Loyalton to down here on Mayberry Drive on the Marks ranch. I done all of that, and I used all of my money. We leased the Marks ranch down there where it's all developed now; it's all homes up there, this side of the Caughlin ranch, the other side of the Mayberry ranch. We had that for 2, 3 years.

*Let me back up now, before you go ahead. When you were living up in Loyalton, did your father work at all?*

Yes, he worked for the lumber company in the lumberyard doing different things.

*He didn't work on your gang, though?*

No, that's too hard of work. That was a young man's job; that was a tough job. A lot of men couldn't stand it. They'd work a few days and then they said, "Well, I just can't take it." You're handling green lumber; it's manual labor.

*Really heavy.*

Heavy, yes.

*Do you remember the names of any of the guys that worked for you up there?*

Boy, I had a whole crew. Let me see. One of them was Bill Candido.

*Let me ask you a question differently. Without trying to think of the individual names, were most of those fellows Italians?*

No, not most of them.

*You had some that were Italians and some weren't?*

Some were Italians and Norwegians, that is, Danes or what is the other?

*Swedish?*

Swedish. Swedes or Danes. They're rugged people.

*Yes, I know they are. [laughter] Well, where would you find those fellows? Where would you find the workers?*

They were there because they had the contract for stacking the lumber out into the yard. See, it was natural dry, then. We'd stack the lumber out to natural dry, let the breeze dry it. In years later, now, they dry the lumber in what they call a dry kiln. They run these trucks in there loaded with lumber on rails. Then they turn the steam on. They cook the lumber today. They kill those fibers in those boards. Those boards are more like a cracker.

*Just snap?*

Snap. Which the others—natural dry—those fibers, there's still life in them. You couldn't snap a board like [those] boards. Today, a 1-by-12 board, she just snaps up like a cracker. It's the hurry-up, quick turnover—that's the whole world today.

*Yes. Was your third partner, Tortorola, from Italy, too?*

Yes. Wait a minute. Was he born here? He went to school here. There was 3 boys. The eldest boy was in trouble in Italy. I don't know what kind of trouble, but they had to move here. The father says, "Let's move out of here," because I guess he wanted to get him away from that environment, that loose people. Go to America. So they moved to America,

moved to Verdi. The father...big tall man...you see this house here?

*This house?*

This was up on [Interstate 80], and I bought it for \$10. This was a Tortorola house. Not the back end here, but from over to here.

All right. He moved over here...this country...and that kid never did straighten out. He was in trouble here all the time. He was in trouble over to Beckwourth; he had a heck of a big squabble over there. I don't know whether he killed anybody or not, but he walked from there to here across the mountain. He ended up down in San Francisco—they killed him. They got rid of him in San Francisco. Then his brother, Mario, ended up over in Loyalton. Mario hasn't been dead very long, no. Then Rocco is the youngest; he's gone, too. The other 2 boys were very fine, hard-working boys. But this one, that's how they happened to come to this country, to try to change the environment.

*Didn't work, though?*

No. He was in trouble here.

*What kind of trouble did he have here?*

Well, that I can't tell you, but he was in trouble all the time, yes.

*You mean like criminal trouble or something?*

Yes. Fighting. He was afraid of nobody; nobody could handle him. There was other fellows here, too, like that years ago...that they were afraid of nobody. They weren't afraid of the law or afraid of nobody.

*Where were the Tortorolas from in Italy?*

They were from Genoa.

*So you knew Rocco.. .you both went to school here. Was he about your age or was he older or younger?*

He was about my age.

*So you took him as partners up there?*

Yes. He was a hard worker—reliable, nice fellow. He was a little bit.. .he had girl trouble. A woman could really twist him around her finger. He didn't have too much schooling, either. Years ago, that's what's the matter. It hurt me plenty. Soon as you got up to where you could...especially if you was the oldest of the family...they'd get you out to help raise the family. That was the same with the Sinelio family. Joe Sinelio couldn't even hardly spell his own name, but his sister— his sister's still alive, I think—she was different. We used to walk down there up to Mogul to school.

See what a great change I have seen in the ways of life— from the horse and the buggy and the horses as the machinery? We didn't have no machines those days to do the work; it was the animal—to go to the moon.

*Why did you quit Loyalton? If you had a contract up there and you were making good money, why did you quit the contract?*

I wanted to move my family away from Loyalton. I thought maybe going back on the ranch was more stable. My dad and Frank Marks were great friends. Now, Frank Marks was a German, but his grandfather moved to Italy, and he considers himself an Italian.

*He spoke Italian?*

Oh, yes. He married an Italian woman. And then he moved to Stockton before he sold the ranch, when they leased the ranch to us.

*Is that why he leased it? He wanted to get out?*

Yes, he wanted to get down....

*Everybody wanted to go to Stockton?*

Yes.

*Were there other cases like that? Do you know other Italian families up here that sold out and moved down to Stockton?*

Yes. There was a fellow from Truckee— had a wood contract hauling wood off the mountains for the Floriston paper mill, Crown Willamette Paper Company—John Delfatti. [He] moved to Stockton. Joe Leonardi moved to Stockton.

*He had a bar here, didn't he?*

He had a bar here. No, he didn't move to Stockton. He moved to Santa Rosa.

*That was pretty popular to go down there?*

Everybody wanted to live in California at one time, yes.

*They thought Nevada was a little too populated?*

Here's the whole story. It's wine country. Do you know that they used to ship cattle car loads of grapes to Verdi here and even to Reno? Railroad cars! During Prohibition, the Italian family could make 200 gallons of wine. Legally. They used to ship it in cattle cars, for the aeration.

*So the grapes wouldn't spoil.*

Yes.

*But everybody wanted to have their own vineyard?*

They wanted to make their own wine.

*So the fellows up here who moved down to Stockton kind of wanted their own orchards and vineyards?*

Yes, and some of them had their own vineyards. I was down at Mr. Marks's one winter, and he came after me, and I went out there and planted grapevines. We take grapevine, about that long, and leave 2, 3 eyes on it and stick it in the ground, and it'll grow.

*No roots or anything?*

No, it'll root itself. Of course, he had 2, 3 good-looking daughters, too.

*Oh, so that was part of the...?*

That's why I, yes....

*That was after you had this ranch here? His ranch? Because he didn't move down there till after you leased that.*

No. He had the ranch leased to somebody else before he leased to us, and he was already there.

*You went down and helped him one winter?*

He knew me and he knew my uncle, and he came up and got me to go out there and help him plant....

*That's while you were still in Loyalton?*

Yes.

*Then you came and you helped him. Did he pay you for it, or did you just do it as a favor?*

No, I just got board and room there. I don't think he paid me.

*Do you remember how long you worked on that, how long you worked out there on that farm with him planting those grapes?*

No. I wasn't there very long. It was just during the winter months.

*But you were there for several weeks or something like that?*

Oh, yes. I was there for maybe a month or so, come to think of it. Maybe a couple of months. Instead of staying with my uncle, I'd stay there. Also, I worked on his automobiles, and I done a little bit of everything. It was just pastime for me.

*Yes. What about other winters when you went down there to Stockton. Did you used to work at all? Were there other winters in which you went out and worked for people like that?*

No. Wait a minute. I did. My sister married somebody...I worked where they build a building and the structures are all steel. I worked on that for a while building one of those. Also worked in there drilling the holes and [cutting] and also climbing up and building, right on the main street of Stockton. I didn't work there very long.

*And he was your brother-in-law?*



No. It was my brother-in-law's brother that got me to go in there and do some work. I didn't need the job, but I...

*Just helped out?*

Yes...make a few extra dollars.

*Well, let's back up a minute. You wanted to get your family out of Loyalton. You felt that your father would be better on a ranch, that he'd be happier?*

Yes. He wasn't that kind of a person. My dad could talk very good American, very good. He was altogether different from what his oldest brother was. Jim, he was a go-getter. He was after that almighty dollar. My father... money to him didn't mean nothing. He'd rather be out there on that ranch, and nothing worried him at all.

My dad lived a good life. He didn't want to belong to anything. Nothing excited him. Nothing.

Like when we were on all these ranches here, he just had his shovel on his back and his dog, and he done all the irrigating see. In this country you have to irrigate here. He done all the irrigating, and nothing ever worried him. We'd come home from dances 2:00, 3:00 in the morning. He'd wake up and he'd come out and he'd sit down and have a piece of cheese and a piece of bread and a glass of wine and maybe 2, 3 kernels of garlic—raw. Then he'd go back to bed. Man, he was just all man. One time, he got pretty sick, down on the Marks ranch, and he got pneumonia. That was unusual for him. But that's the only time that he was ever sick that we can remember.

We had a Dr. Miniggio in Reno—one of the greatest doctors that Reno ever had. Italian doctor. I used to go down and get Dr. Miniggio early in the morning. I'd leave

about 7:00, go down and get him, and he'd be walking up the road. I'd pick him up, take him up there, and he'd work on my dad, and then he'd walk back. He'd *walk* back!

The first thing he done was go to St. Mary's Hospital. All the patients that he had in there... he was a great doctor; lot of history to him. He left Italy—he was a doctor in the war in Tripoli, in Eritrea.

*Eritrea, Somalia, and all that? The Somali War.*

And Tripoli and all that. Yes. He was a physician there, and I *think* it was family trouble why he came to this country. But was he a doctor, oh!

*Do you know what part of Italy he was from?*

I think Piedmont. I'm not sure though. But I know that his family tried to get him to come back to Italy. I think one of his daughters came over here to try to get him to go back.

There was a great man here in Reno... Wilson. He married a Verdi girl. One of his son's a professor at the university. He was a mayor or councilman one time. He had the Wilson Drugstore and belonged to the Knights of Pythias Lodge. He says, "That doctor saved my people."

He was one of the greatest doctors—medicine doctor, not a surgeon—a medical doctor. I think he was even a prisoner over there. He was right out there on battlefields... Dr. Miniggio.

You like to know a lot about Italians, is that it?

*I'm interested in that, yes.*

There's Ben and Joe Maffi and Catherine. She's married [to] a Lyons now. Benny Maffi



was also a councilman here in Reno, and he was born just about maybe 2 miles up the river from where I was born in Italy. His brother, Joe, was a big contractor out in Carson. He's one of the directors of the Union Federal and Loan bank. They got a different name now—First Federal Savings and Loan. Then there's a Lino Del Grande; he's the son of a section foreman that used to be here. I think his wife is Estelle. I think she's related to me in one way. Her and my first wife were cousins, I think. Lino was born here, and he worked up in one of the biggest banks—First Interstate Bank—in town. Yes, he got way up to the top there.

*This Del Grande, do you remember where his dad was from in Italy?*

Yes, from Tuscany. His uncle was a track walker, also.

*The First Interstate Bank used to be the First National Bank. That was a Sicilian operation, wasn't it?*

No. What was his name? He was originally from Winnemucca, I think, or Elko.. one of them. I think a Ferrari married one of his daughters. [Ferrari's] son was a commissioner... Benny Ferrari. He now lives up at Incline—the father does and also the son.

Now, there was a Cupples that was the Southern Pacific roadmaster stationed in Truckee. Also, his brother was a section foreman in the Reno station.

*Were they Italian?*

No, but he had a lot of Italians working for him [in Reno]. There was quite a few Italians here...there's a paper mill at Floriston.

*You told me that there was one, yes.*

There was mostly Italian people that would haul the wood from these mountains back of Truckee and all over everywhere up in these mountains, because that's what they made paper out of was wood. And 2 brothers—they came from the same town where I was born in Italy—were the Borsi brothers. Then there was a Sam Costa. He had a big operation.

*Where was Sam from?*

[Sam passed away.] His son is in the police department in Sparks, I think. He was northern Italian. I think he was up close to the Austrian border. And then there was another fellow by the name of Delfatti. He was from a town just below—like, say, Mogul down here—just down the river from where I was born. And they were wood haulers.

*They were all wood haulers? They'd go up in the mountains and cut wood and bring it to Floriston?*

There's several men all over these mountains...the paper company owned a lot of land up in these mountains. They'd build a cabin up in these mountains, and then they'd store it with provisions—food. Then when the sawmills closed down, some of them worked in the ice plants. There were several natural ice plants here.

Yes.

But probably those that worked in the sawmills...that's where they would go, in these cabins way up on the top of the mountains. Before the snow came, they'd walk in or [if] there's snow, they had to go in there with snowshoes. And they would cut that wood—

whenever the weather was all right, that is, that they could get outside and work. But that's why there was a cabin here and a cabin there and a cabin over there all over these mountains.

You know why they'd go there? Because they wouldn't have to pay no rent. Then whenever they could work and it wasn't storming, why, then they'd go out there, and they'd cut this wood.

Yes.

They were getting a dollar and a half a cord. It sounds cheap, but they could spend the winter there—it wouldn't cost them anything. Besides that, they'd make some side money cutting wood.

*Yes. So a lot of Italians did that?*

Oh, yes. All over these mountains! Even up here on Duffy's Camp, which is up Bronco Creek. It heads up into Nevada.. starts in California, drains right out just past Floriston. But it circles on this way, and it ends up right just the base of Mount Rose. One place, they've called Duffy's Camp, because a man from Fresno—a rancher—used to come up there and haul the wood when the snow was all gone to this.. didn't I tell you about the sawmill that was up there? I think I did.

*Well, maybe you better tell me again.*

Yes. The paper company hauled a sawmill up there with oxen.

*Yes. Up to Duffy's Camp?*

Up to Duffy's Camp. They built a flume all the way from Duffy's Camp—would be

the north fork of Bronco Creek— all the way down to Floriston, over the railroad track and everything. They cut the wood 4 feet long. You've seen cordwood split?

*Yes, right.*

All right. Then they'd split it, of course. When Mr. Duffy could come up there with his horses, why, he'd haul the wood to this flume. They'd put the water in it, and then just one stick after another...

*Just take it right on down to Floriston?*

Yes.

*Were there many Italian fellows working right there in the mill itself?*

Yes, quite a few.

*What about in Floriston?*

In Floriston, too.

*So in both camps—the sawmill up on top and also down below—there were a lot of Italian men?*

Yes, and the sawmill was hauled up there to build the flume. Then it was left there, and during the Second World War a fellow by the name of Bill Sario, a sheepman's son, went up and hauled the mill out of there and sold it for iron. Gosh darn it...Bill Sario. He had a logging truck, besides.

*He'd have been a Basque fellow, then?*

Yes. That's where they used to range with their sheep.

*Let me ask you something. Now, the men that you just gave me their names—Delfatti, Costa, Borsi—you said they were wood haulers.*

Yes.

*What did that mean—wood haulers? What did they do?*

With their horse and wagons.

*Oh, they had their own horses and wagons?*

They'd contract with the paper company.

*Before the flume?*

Yes. Well, even after the flume because there was a lot of places up out of Hobart Mills—in back of Truckee and up in Euer Valley and Carpenter Valley.

*So there were places where there was no flume?*

Yes. But there where there was a flume, then that was Mr. Duffy. He had a regular camp up there, a big camp.

He even hauled wood with mules. They couldn't build a road. They had pack saddles on the mules, and they had clamp hubs...one set of clamps here and a set of clamps here. And then they'd pile the wood in there.

*No kidding!*

So much wood. Then those mules would pack that wood off of that hillside there.

*But a dollar and a half a cord...you weren't earning any money.*

Well, I don't know how much he got to haul the wood. That I can't tell you. But it's a

dollar and a half a cord to tall a tree and buck the...4 foot long...board wood and then split it with a sledgehammer.

*Would most of those Italian guys that worked up there live alone during the winter, or would they be with a partner?*

Some of them'd be alone. There was men up there that would fall that tree by *themselves* with a crosscut. Then they'd limb it, and then they'd buck it 4 foot long...with a hand saw. Whoa, whoa, whoa! And listen, *you better not touch that hand saw*—it was a 6-foot crosscut saw—because that saw was, oh, better than anything! They kept it just sharp and just right, just perfect. Oh, don't ever go near that saw! Oh, don't you touch that saw!

There were several men worked by themselves, and people can't believe it, but they fell that tree all by themselves. Well, my father and his 2 brothers—Uncle Jim and Uncle Joe— [did that]. I think I told you about that.

*Yes. Talking to you, Joe, one of the impressions I get is that all of these mountains had a lot more people in them in those days, a lot more activity than now.*

Yes.

*When you think about it, now there's no miners really and not much timber, not much of anything. But all these little cabins and settlements....*

Well, there used to be a lot of sawmills up here. In California, there was a sawmill up in Robinson Canyon, right up in back of the Belli ranch up back of Boomtown. Then there was a sawmill over what we call Sunrise. Then there was a sawmill up at the state line. Then

there was a sawmill in Dog Valley; there was 1, 2, 3, 4 sawmills.

*All operating at the same time?*

No.

*How many people would have lived in there to work in those sawmills and all that?*

Well, quite a few people. They couldn't travel back and forth unless they rode with a horse and a wagon or walk. They had to have a camp there.

*So there'd be quite a few people in there, right?*

Oh, yes. With the logging crew and to get the logs to the mill I'd say there was 10 people at the mill; they were not big mills—small mills mostly. They were circular mills... circular saws. Instead of band saws they had circular saws. Oh, there was at least 50 people to each mill.

*So there were a lot more people living in the hills in those days?*

Yes. Then on the other side of that mountain there, there was the Winnie Smith mill, George Warren's mill...there were sawmills all over that mountain. Up in Truckee and Hobart Mills and Sardine Valley. In Sardine Valley there was the Davis mill. There was a mill up in the Russel Valley. There was mills all over—everywhere—because how they used to build everything those days was lumber. All the factories and all the homes and everything was built out of wood, lumber. The families in the town over there [in Italy], they tell me the a have a nickname.

*Each family's got a nickname?*

Yes. We were known as the Rosa family.

*Like in "rose," the flower?*

Yes. Rosa.

*Do you know why they called you that?*

No. And then my mother's side of the family was Sasella. That's her maiden name. But Michaelletti was their nickname. I don't know what it means. The Michaelletti family.

*Do you remember what the Maffi family was known as? They were from your village, weren't they?*

They were from the little town of Terello. Just like the base of that mountain over there. Every few miles there was a little town, and clean way up on the Alps before they got to Switzerland.

*But you don't remember what the Maffi family was called?*

I don't know. I told you about my mother carrying waste—droppings—from the cows and the goats, and they carried it up on the mountain on their back. Then they carried the hay and what they grew up on the mountains down....

*They carried it right on their backs? They didn't have donkeys or anything?*

Well, they also had donkeys—mostly mules. Did I ever tell you about the time that we were...it was all cobblestone trails because it rains over there every week or so. To protect the trail it was all cobblestone. We were going up, and I was walking with my mother. At that time of the year someone

was cutting hay with a scythe. And there was 2 men coming up the trail packing a ladder, because they were moving the priest up in this church up on the mountain. It'd had to have been the spring of the year, I suppose...they were cutting hay, so it had to be. There was 2 young ladies helping these people cutting hay. And these young men were walking up, they didn't lead the mule; the mule went by command. He was nibbling along the trail for grass, and this big load of whatever he had on there—all the provisions and the food and everything for the priest, I suppose—and they were carrying this ladder. Here the mule was eating and nibbling along the trail, and the young men were talking to these girls and kidding them—with this ladder—one in front and one in the back of this ladder. And they hit the mule in the rear, and the mule bucked up, and a bottle or a jug of wine fell out of the pack and broke. And the wine was running down the cobblestone trail. Every now and then, there was one of the stones missing; the wine was running down and running in where the cobblestone was...and a cavity there. And I was running after oranges that were clunk, clunk, clunk down the....

*[laughter] They were rolling down...?*

Oranges up in the Alps! And these young men or the men who were cutting the hay—I don't know which—ran down, and they were drinking the wine out of that hole!

*Really? Didn't want to lose it? [laughter]*

No! Now, you see what I've seen over there? That's one thing that I remembered *all* my life; it made such an impression.

*Those guys were right down there on their hands and knees trying to get that wine?*

Yes! And I'm not lying; it's true! And me, I run after these oranges, up there in the Italian Alps, above Grosio.

And in this country they used to laugh at the people here that carried their babies on their back.

*Yes.*

Now everybody's carrying them on their back because that's the easiest on the mother to carry the baby that way. She doesn't have to carry him in her arms; he's safer there than in her arms. What if she falls down?

*Right.*

Now they make regular carriers. Pretty near everybody that you see now in this country, why, when they carried their babies, they carried them on their back.

*So that's what they did in Grosio, too? They carried their babies on their backs?*

Oh, yes. They carried them with a shawl or they made something out of cloth. I don't know how they made it, how they fixed it so his legs would stick out on the side. They wrapped him in a cloth band. I don't know how wide, but they rolled them up, and they said it kept them warm and also, as they were growing, it kept their limbs straight, and also their back. That's what my mother used to say.

*Did your mother used to do that here in America when she had babies here?*

Yes, she done the same thing here in Verdi.

*Did the other women do that, too?*

Some of the older women. I don't remember much about that.

I remember down here at Judkin's Hole—it was named after some old-timer here—where we used to go swimming. Down in the river there's a certain place where the river was safe. We used to go swimming in there, and "Let's go down to Judkin's" That was the swimming hole in the river.

*Near Verdi here?*

Right here in town, yes, down on the river. [There was a slaughterhouse at Judkin's.]

There was a lot of Italian people here. The big majority was Italian and French—old country French and some Canadians migrated here. Every year most of them, especially the Italian, would make salami. Pretty near everybody here then had hogs out in the backyard, if they had room for them. They didn't have them too close to the house; they kept them clean anyway. And they fed them...they never threw anything away.

*All went right to the hogs?*

Yes, anything that they could feed to them. They didn't throw nothing away those days. They used to buy them in the spring and feed them, and then in the fall they'd butcher them. They'd get, oh, 2 or 3 hundred-pound hogs. They made sausage and salami mostly, and my mother rendered all of the fat. She made soap with a lot of the fat. She never bought no soap. She used potash. Certain parts of the hog they got fat [for] soap, and the other part she used for cooking.

*Like oil or cooking oil?*

Yes, like cooking oil. But the Italians mostly used to send even down to San Francisco and

buy I don't know how many gallons of olive oil. Mostly their main ingredient to cook with is olive oil. It came out mostly from San Francisco.

*Did a lot of individual families have a cow?*

Some of them have 2. They'd have one cow that would give birth at one time, and then....

*Birth a little later and stagger it?*

They staggered them, and they had milk year around. You couldn't go in a store and buy milk, then. You couldn't go in the store and buy bread. Do you know what we had out here in the backyard? Had a big rock oven. And my mother used to...well, all these old country people.... You couldn't go buy bread at the store; we used to buy flour. You know how they used to buy flour from the Reno Flour Mill?

No.

By the *ton*! So many sacks. If you bought 2,000 pounds, you got a deal. Mr. Berrum, the brother of the Berrum that had Moana Springs; he had a flour mill right on Winter Street, in the 200 block of Winter Street [in back of 723 West Second, facing Winter Street]. He used to buy most all of the wheat that was harvested around here, and he'd grind it up and make flour.

In fact, there was 2 flour mills in Reno from way back. And if my father could afford it, he bought one ton of flour.

*You grew some wheat, too, didn't you?*

Oh, in the ranches we grew wheat.

*What would you do with the wheat?*



Sell it to....

*To Mr. Berrum?*

Yes.

*And then buy the flour back?*

Yes. If we didn't grow any wheat, we'd buy the flour, anyway. Most all of these old Italians here, if they didn't buy a whole ton at one time—didn't have a place to keep it— they'd buy half a ton.

My mother in here would go like this with that dough...and make doughs that big. Then she'd wrap it in cheesecloth. And she'd have one here, one here, one here; she'd have...well, as many as would fit in that big oven.

And us kids'd have to go out to—we never bought no wood. Make us go down along the river and pick up dry limbs and dry willows and bring them in, and that's how she used to heat all those rocks. My dad was a stonemason.

And the rest of them, too. They either made them out of brick, if they had brick, but they were mostly stones, see? And then we'd heat that oven; in other words we'd heat all those rocks—rock base and rocks all over. Then she'd make us clean it off—or she would—and she had a little rake thing to go in there and...whoosh—get all the ashes out. And she had a mop like, and she'd go in there and mop it out. She didn't have no test irons to see how hot it was—she had to have a certain heat. She'd get a pinch of flour, and she'd go... whooo! She could tell whether they were still too hot to scorch the dough, understand?

Yes.

Wait a little while. Hup! All righty! Then we had a paddle with a long handle. A n d

she'd unroll it off of this cheesecloth; then she'd cut a slice in it, in this gob of dough. She'd put a little flour so it'd slip off...do the same thing with 10 or 12 or more of great big gobs.

My dad had a door here, an opening, and he had a thing that fit right in there—plugged it. Go in, forget about it. After so long, my mother'd peek in there. When it was all ready, the bread'd be...and that bread never got hard. You know why?

*Why?*

There was no salt in that dough. Salt made it get hard. That's the bread we'd eat for a week or maybe 2 weeks.

*So about every week or 2 she'd have to make more bread?*

Yes. All of the old Italian families—every one of them—that's what they had. They had their bread oven right out in the backyard.

And those ashes that came out of that stove...you know where those ashes went?

*Where? In the garden?*

You bet your life. And you never had no bugs on our cabbage or anything. She used to sprinkle the ashes....

You see how we lived? We never bought anything from a store. Well, you couldn't buy no canned food; you couldn't buy no bread; you couldn't buy no milk. The only thing you could've bought from up here was...well, they had a butcher shop up here. That's one thing that they did have at this store here. Verdi Lumber Company had a butcher shop. That slaughterhouse that's over at the ranch now, they did own that ranch one time—the Verdi Lumber Company. They built that



slaughterhouse. But we had hogs. I'd say we had 10 or 12 sows—that's the females.

Yes.

And we also had the boar.

*So you must have sold some pigs, too, because you couldn't eat all those pigs.*

Yes. We sold quite a few of them.

*Where would you sell the pigs? Who would you sell them to?*

We'd sell them to people that'd buy weaners, little fellows.

Let me tell you another thing. Those female sows, as we called them—pigs—whenever they had to have young, we had pens for them. Do you think...this sounds funny.. do you think that any of us men or any of us boys could walk into that pen and try to pet her or something? Grrr!

*She'd really get mad?*

You know who could go in there?

Who?

My mother.

*She wouldn't say anything to your mother?*

When [the sow] was ready to have pigs, she'd lie down, and my mother'd go and rub her between her udders or whatever you call her tits. She'd run her hand up and down like that.

*And that sow would let her do it?*

And the old sow would just...ha, ha! And none of us could touch her! Not only that sow—all of them.

*Really?*

Why, now, people won't believe it. I went in high school when I was lecturing; I tried to tell them. Why is it? Does that animal know?

*I don't know, but sometimes dogs are that way, too. Some dogs'll bark at men and they won't bark at women. I had a dog like that. No man could come near the place, but he'd never bark at women or kids, but any man—he barked just right now. And he could tell the difference between a man and woman. Why he thought men were bad and women weren't, I don't know.*

The scent.

*Could be.*

It has to be the scent. Now, it's like these dogs, [referring to his 3 dogs]. Here they are; they're laying down out there. I leave them once in a while—not very often because they raise hell. And I'm down here about the second house down. They're out there... bowwowwowwow, bowwowwowwow! How do they know? Do they know the sound of that automobile, the sound of that motor?

*Could be that they know your motor.*

It isn't the scent. The scent couldn't get here, because I was working against the wind. It had to be the sound of that motor. Now, when I was in charge of all of them logging operations, I had a dog named Dynamite. I always had a dog with me, all the time. But I

had a dog that I'd start here, on this hill here, through the thick manzanita. I had to part my way through, walking on dead trees that fell. Windfalls, we call them. And I'd be *way* up there on the hill, a half mile away or more, and I'd look down the hill, and do you know that dog followed up through that brush, followed up on that dead tree where I walked and all that. How do they know it? What is it that I leave there?

*Well, that could be the scent.*

That has to be the scent. Do we leave a scent? We have to.

*Oh, yes. We do.*

*Let's get back to the Italians. Did they make wine, too, at the houses?*

Yes.

*Did your dad make his own wine?*

Yes. We still have the wine press. Great big press. Then I had a great big tank; it would hold a ton or more of grapes. They used to ship it in here in Verdi, even. But in Reno, that was big business. During Prohibition each Italian family, or any other family, could make 200 gallons of wine, because that was part of their—well, what would you call it?—their beverage with their food.

*Right.*

Yes. But you had to be married. You had to be a family.

*Did more than one family get together and make wine, or would each family make its own?*

Well, some of the families'd get together, but they'd have a bigger tank. They'd have to get permission from the... what did we call it? Not the FBI.

*Revenuers?*

Revenue, yes.

*Would they come out and inspect and make sure that you didn't make too much?*

Yes, sure. One thing that some of them did—illegal— they'd make the second wine, see. First draw out the first wine from the tank; they had a big faucet down here to open it, and what flowed out by itself—that was the first-class wine. Then the vines, they all had lots of moisture in them. So they'd take that, and sometimes they'd put some water in there, and then they'd put some sugar in there, and they'd cheat a little bit. Then they'd let that ferment. Then that would be the second wine, see. That there would be the wine that some of them who'd do this, instead of giving the first-class wine with a friend that come to the house, they'd give them the second wine.

*Yes! [laughter] You could tell what the host thought of you by which kind of wine he served!*

He knew the second wine when he drank it, if he was an Italian. [laughter] But, anyway, that was the wine that was put in this big press. They'd press the hell out of it and get every bit of the moisture out of there. Then the mash, some of those guys would haul it away someplace and hide out, and they'd make jackass out of it.

*Jackass they called it?*

Well, they called it *grappa*.

*Grappa. Yes, I was going to ask about grappa. Some of them made grappa?*

Yes.

*Boy, that stuff's strong. I've had that in Italy.*

Yes. They had that little still of their own. You've tried *grappa*?

*I don't much like it. It's too strong for me.*

My dad, that's what he'd make us kids in the morning— take a little shot of grape. Just one little shot!

*Each of you kids would?*

He'd make us kids drink it. He'd make us kids drink wine with our meals! One little glassful; that's all you had to have.

*But you had to have that?*

You'd be surprised how many Italian young people that were raised that way were not drinkers. Two of my sisters would never touch it. Oh, my dad used to give them hell. Both my sisters never did touch liquor.

*What about pasta? Where would you get the pasta, because I'm sure you ate a lot of pasta, right? Did you make it all at home?*

Bought flour by the ton, like I said. And it was all made at home.

*You didn't ever go to the store to buy pasta?*

No! In later years, there was a big pasta factory in San Francisco. Oh, man! All kinds

of fancy pasta. They had a big roller with a handle—rrr, rrr, rrr—flatten it out, and then turn it over, flatten it out again. Then they'd roll it up in rolls, and then they'd slice it. It didn't cost that very much to eat.

*No, really..*

But Mama made everything, like the pasta, and then the gravy was made out of rabbits that we had down here, or chickens.

*What about sugo? How would you make the sugo for the pasta and whatnot—the tomato sauce? Did you grow a lot of tomatoes?*

Oh, the garden was full of tomatoes.

*She'd can them for the winter?*

Yes. They also made it so it's dry...kind of a paste. How in the hell did they preserve that? I forget now. But they saved every little carrot, everything!

Over at the ranch, we didn't have no refrigerators. Over there at the Donner Trail ranch, we built a cabin into the hill there, with a sod roof, and the spring running out—natural water. Spring was running through the middle in the floor, and here she had shelves. She kept everything there...a certain temperature all the time. That's how she used to cure the cheese.

*She'd make cheeses and put them in there?*

Yes. She put them up on these shelves. And the cheese'd get moldy...*man!* That's what cures the cheese is the mold.

Every time that we butchered a sucking calf, why, my mother took that rennet out of the calf. It's something in the calf before he eats anything [when he's still] sucking; that's what curdles the milk. It's a gland.

Yes. *Was the cheese just for your own family use?*

Yes.

*Did she sell them, too?*

No. Well, once in a while somebody'd want [one]. She'd go to wipe off the [mold and] give it to them.

*Now that we're talking about the old Italians here, were there any stores in Verdi or in Reno that specialized in Italian stuff like salami or olive oil or stuff like that?*

Oh, yes. Yes, Brunetti and Patrone.

*Brunetti and Patrone? That's 2 different stores or one store?*

No, one store.

*One store. Brunetti and Patrone.*

Some of the Brunettis and the Patrones are still alive. Rocco Patrone married Brunetti's daughter.

*Where was that store located?*

Commercial Row where it hits Lake Street.

*Right there on the corner?*

It was facing Lake Street. Commercial Row ends....

*So if you went straight, you'd go right in the store?*

Yes. Rocco Patrone worked in the Verdi box factory.

I got 15¢ an hour; he got 16¢ because he was running the machine. He married one of

Brunetti's daughter, and he ended up down in the grocery store.

*What part of Italy were the Brunettis and the Patrones from?*

I think Genoa.

*Was their store popular? Did a lot of Italians go to that store?*

Oh, yes. And he used to come up here and take orders every now and then.

*He'd deliver?*

Yes.

*Did they come up in a wagon?*

No, I think that's when he had an automobile.

*Can you remember what they used to have in that store? Can you tell me something about the store?*

They had everything you could think of by Italian food.

*Oh, yes? A lot of pasta and stuff like that?*

Yes, oh, all of that. Everything. Olive oil. You could buy anything in there.

*Was it stuff from Italy, or was it made in America?*

I think most of it was from San Francisco. Maybe some of the oil was from Italy.

*Can you think of any other Italian stores in Reno at the time? Didn't there used to be an Italian grocery store on Second Street?*

Yes. But the Piazzo family store was on the 300 block of North Virginia Street.

*Chet and Link Piazzo?*

Yes. And their older brother, Louie, that passed away—he got hurt up there at or by the university someplace. It was in their building they owned on Virginia Street before you get to Fourth. I used to buy all our groceries in there. He had a charge account. He had everything you could think of, too. But that was in later years.

*What part of Italy were the Piazzos from?*

I think they're Genovesi, too.

*What about newspapers? Were there any Italian newspapers around Reno and Verdi or anything?*

No.

*You don't ever remember seeing an Italian newspaper here?*

They used to buy the *Italia*...and what was the other one? There was 2 papers from San Francisco. I think they tried one time here, but they didn't continue it. Maybe wouldn't be enough circulation for it.

*What about clubs? Did the Italians have any kind of clubs, or did they form any groups here in Reno or Verdi or Sparks?*

They had the Italian Benevolent Society.

*Can you tell me about the Italian Benevolent Society?*

I can't tell you very much about it. Anybody could belong to it. Mostly, they

helped some of the Italians that was in trouble. But really, they're not a secret organization.

*When did it start?*

I don't remember that.

*Is that still going? Do they still have that club?*

I don't hear about it no more. I belonged to it a long time. Then I belonged to the Druids. Really, that was the oldest lodge in the world. They really were formed in England. I'm a past secretary of the Druids here in Reno. Then I'm a past chancellor of the Knights of Pythias, Reno Lodge Number 8. And I'm a past noble grand of the Verdi Lodge Number 6 of the Odd Fellows.

*You've been in a lot of those clubs.*

They had me in everything, yes. You see, the Knights of Pythias was the first secret order established in this country, approved by President Grant. A secret order had to be approved, any secret order in this country. That was the first one that was approved in this country, by President Grant. The Knights of Pythias was the leading lodge of the country at one time.

*Oh? President Grant approved the Knights of Pythias? He let them go ahead?*

Yes. Judge Maestretti and Lawrence Gulling and all of those people belonged to it. I was the noble grand, and they got me into it, and they was after me for everything. I was the captain of the drill team for the Knights of Pythias in Reno. I used to be up front leading the parades and all that. We had the uniforms...beautiful.

*Those hats with big feathers on each end?*

Yes. We had everything.

*Were there very many Italians in the Knights of Pythias at the time?*

There was quite a few. See, like me, it was a place to go. They have nothing against religion, but my mother was the only one that tried to make us children go to church.

*Did she used to go to church?*

Yes, all used to go to...now and then, yes. I used to go to church. My mother would go to church, but my father, he said, "I don't have to go to church. I can be a good person without going to church." My father believed in never hurting nobody, and he never wanted to be hurt himself. He was a free thinker, like me. Nothing bothered my father. He just lived from day to day. He never tried to gyp anybody—let's use that word. But he sure didn't want nobody to pull that on him. He never wanted to be a millionaire. He mostly threw everything onto the oldest, and that was me!

*Was there like a Sons of Italy, or is there a Sons of Italy in Reno?*

Yes. Sons of Italy. I was secretary to Sons of Italy.

*What did the Sons of Italy do? As a group, what did they do?*

They were 100 percent for the community, for the country. But you didn't have to be an Italian to belong to it.

*You didn't?*

No. That lodge was started mostly by a group of Italians. Anybody could go...to pass whatever the requirements were.

*Were there very many people that weren't Italian that were members here in Reno?*

Yes, there was quite a few that I can remember.

*Did they used to have like dinners, programs, excursions or anything like that?*

Oh, yes. Had different programs, like any other lodge— same thing.

*It was just kind of like the Odd Fellows or something?*

Like the Odd Fellows.

*What about church? Were you very active in the Catholic church?*

No, I never was much of a church member because here's the way I believe. I don't have to go to church to be a good person. I believe in never hurting anybody, and I don't want anybody to hurt me. I'm no better than anybody, and there's nobody better than I. I don't have to go to church. I think I'm good enough to know right from wrong, and I don't have to go to that church to be told this and told that and told the other thing.

You see, I've seen a lot of things in people that belong to church. None of my business, really, but I've seen people that go to church, and you'd be surprised what I know about them...that I wouldn't do.

*So there's a lot of hypocrites that go to church is what you're saying?*



Yes. I figured this. In my brains am I weak enough that I have to go to that other human being over there to tell me to do right from wrong? No. I'm qualified....

*You mean the priest. You don't think you need to go to the priest?*

No, I don't have to go to that priest. I know something about a priest in Stockton that you'd be surprised. A priest to me is just another human being.

*Did they used to have very many Italian priests around here? Were any of the churches very Italian?*

There was one Italian priest that was here from Italy. He tried to get me to go to church. I says, "I don't have to go to church. I don't do anything wrong; I never hurt nobody." I says, "I wouldn't hurt anybody, and I don't want anybody to hurt me. I don't have to go to church." I says, "What are you doing here?" This was in a bar.

*This was in a bar?*

Yes. He was from Italy. I've seen quite a few things.

There was one person that was here from Italy that I admired; I respected very much. Highly educated—Dr. Miniggio. One of those most brilliant men that I have ever seen. He was honest. We lived on the Marks ranch about 3 miles out of Reno, and my dad got sick in bed, and he'd walk from his office down on Second Street in the about the 100 block up to the ranch in the morning, and I'd take him back. And he done that for exercise. He was in the war of Tripoli, Tripoli war.

*Did the local Italians here, back in the early days have any kind of celebrations together?*

*Were there any special days of the year that they'd honor and celebrate, when they would get together?*

Yes. *L'Assunta*. That was in August. What do they call it?

*The Assumption, in English. The Assumption of Mary.*

Yes, they had a big feed and, oh, they have everything there...people came from all over; they used to...out of Dayton.

*Oh, yes? What would they do at that celebration? L'Assunta is a religious holiday. Did they used to have Mass out there, for instance?*

They'd have everything. These people'd come from all over, everywhere. They had long tables, and they had food everywhere, and people'd talk and they'd dance.

*Who'd put that on? Who organized that? It must have been a big job.*

Yes. In.. .well, it's like *carnevale*. That's really what it is, but we had another name for it. They didn't call it *L'Assunta*. Every year they used to have it out at Dayton. They still have it—Santa Maria's Day.

*What about in Reno? Was there ever anything in Reno? A big party or a big celebration for Italians?*

No.

*I remember when I was a kid, Mrs. Benetti, who is the wife of my father's partner in business, would sometimes take us to the cathedral—St. Thomas Aquinas. I think it was Sons of Italy who, about once a year, had a spaghetti feed down in the basement there.*



Oh, they'd have those things now and then, here and there, a big get-together. Yes, they'd have those quite often.

*What about dances? Were there any special days of the year, like New Year's Day or something, that they'd have a special dance?*

Yes. Every Sunday night at the old Odd Fellows building up in the fourth floor.

*This is in Reno?*

Oh, yes. It was in the 100 block of East Second Street. It burned down in 1945. All the families from all over the country came there—the whole family—everybody.

*Just the Italian families?*

Italian and other families if they wanted to. And we had Tony Pecetti and Louis Rosasco...accordion. And the drums. The whole family'd be there—all the children and everybody. They had that every Sunday. And us young guys, naturally, we were there.

*You were there all the time?*

Oh, yes. Then from there we used to go down to Lake Street at the Indart Basque place, and they'd have a dance down there.

Louis Piretto married a little Basque girl that he met down there. I was the one that told him about it. I was down there. So I went up there, and I said, "Hey, you guys! Boy, you ought to see the pretty girls down in the Indart, down there." And I said to Louie, who was good looking, I said, "Boy, is there a cute little Basque girl down...." He married her!

*He went down and married her? [laughter]*

Well, he got acquainted with her, and he married her. [laughter]

*Did that Basque hotel—Indart's—have another name?*

I think it was the Indart. It was kind of an eating place and a bar.

They used to have that in Verdi here. There was 7 or 8 bars here in Verdi one time. Let me see, there was Joe Leonardi, the Western, there was the Oak, the Toscano, and the Owl, and the Country Club and the Verdi Hotel owned by O'Conner at that time. There's 2 other saloons. Later on they danced. There was a bar in front, then there was a dining hall, and then the kitchen. And every now and then one would have it one time, one the next...on a Saturday. They done it to make money naturally. They'd have just an accordion player mostly. Sometimes there'd be a drummer, too. The mothers and the fathers and the children would all go and sit in the dining room, and then the accordion'd start. They had a dance floor where they served the dinners. Then after every dance, you had to take your girl or your woman friend up to the bar.

*Oh, yes?*

See, it was a big racket.

*Yes, right! And buy her a drink! [laughter]*

They all done it. Every one of them. Yes, Joe Leonardi, who was one of the smartest men in town, very much to the front—he moved his whole family to Santa Rosa—he had a bar here—the Western. His father named the Western.

*Who owned the Owl?*

Joe Pincolini.

*And what about the Country Club?*

Gene Coe owned the Country Club.

*So most of those bars here in Verdi were owned by Italians, then?*

Yes. The Verdi Hotel was owned by O'Connor. And the Lincoln House was owned by Galli and Associates, and the Verdi Inn was owned by Panelli. He's still alive; he's between 93 and 95.

*Does he still live here?*

No. One of his grandsons [Ed Engel] lives here. He owns that over there, yet. Panelli lives down there...what is it, San Mateo? He lives with his son; he had 2 sons. His son was way highly educated with the airplane manufacturing people. He even goes to Washington and speaks before Congress.

*Where in Italy was the Panelli family from?*

Toscana. There was quite a few Toscanos here. A lot of them worked on the railroad, too. Years ago it was Chinese, then it was Irish, then it went to Italians. Now it's Mexican on the railroad.

*How did the Italians get on with the Basques?*

Oh, they get along.

*You said that you fellows would go over down to Indart's place when the Italian dance was over with. Did the Basques used to come over to your dance, too, at the Odd Fellows?*

Yes. Not too much. They didn't do as much as we'd go down there, and they wouldn't come up to our dance as much. More of us would go down there. Charlie Pirolli\*, and me, and Ernest Capurro and....

*The Basques didn't mind when they saw you coming?*

No, no. Heck, no.

*Well, there were some Italian boardinghouses or hotels in Reno, too, weren't there? Can you think of any of the boardinghouses that we had in Reno?*

There was Colombo. That was on the corner of Douglas Alley on Lake Street.

*Who owned that Colombo?*

One of the Curtis. Mike Curti and his brother [Phil]. There're some of the Curtis still here. They had a ranch out of Sparks. One of them's the head of the Steamboat Canal Company. Phil Curti, I remember him in Truckee, and then he moved down here. And he was one of the leading bootleggers.

*Oh, yes? [laughter]*

He told McKay and Graham to stay on their side, and he'd stay on his side. He was a rough customer. Afraid of nobody. Oh, what I've seen during the bootlegging days.

Mike Curti was married to one of the whatchamacallit girls down there. I think he was married to one of them. Maybe I shouldn't say that, but I can't prove it.

*You mean with one of the prostitutes in Reno?*

Yes. There used to be 3 places of prostitution in Reno.

*Well, they used to have a line down along the river there, didn't they, across from the police station?*

There was one there, but before that it was down at the Alamo, down there [on] Lake Street. You never used to cross the river; there was no bridge across the river. There was no bridge across Sierra Street, either. I remember all of that.

Before you cross the bridge on Lake Street, right along the river there, that used to be the Alamo. One dollar. Used to be a policeman on the door there. Nobody got in there unless you.....

Then there was one in back of the Mizpah Hotel. That was built by the Pincolini brothers. They were ranchers. They probably still own it.

*The Pincolinis owned the hotel or the cathouse?*

No, the hotel. No, the cathouse was right in the back. You know where the fire department is at?

Yes.

Well, it was in there. That was the Mohawk. Then there was the Green Lantern. That was the high-class one where they had the dance floor. You know where the garbage outfit is?

*Do you mean off of Fourth Street there?*

Yes. Down in there. We used to go down there and dance.

*That was the high-class one, the Green Lantern?*

That was high-class. That a hell of a change I have seen. I go to Reno now, I don't know it!

*Were there any other Italian hotels in Reno besides the Colonibo?*

Yes. There was the Toscano. That was owned by Toscani. Then, also, it was owned by Basques. I think originally it was owned by Italian or French; now, I don't know which. There was 2 right close together there: here's the Colombo, and then the Toscano. Then there was the Mizpah.

*You told me once that there was a big boardinghouse or hotel in Sparks.*

Oh, yes. There was one in Sparks. One of my cousins even owned it, and Steve Besio from Truckee even owned it.

*What was the name of that one?*

I know the name of it, because it ended up that the Zunino brothers?... There was a Zunino family there. [One of them] married a girl from Wadsworth. Her brother was a professor at the university. He's retired now. He was on the agricultural department. Professor Gardella. And 1917, I rode a horse up there, and the old man called me at the ranch down there—below Wadsworth along the river. And we had dinner there. His wife is gone, but he had 2 daughters and 2 boys, I think. One of them was [the] professor.

*What about in Wadsworth? Were there any Italian places—bars or hotels—in Wadsworth?*

Yes. There was one; it was a bar and restaurant and living quarters all in one. I can't think of his name—foreman on the

railroad, I think. At one time [Wadsworth] was the railroad division point. Then there was a branch line that went where? Clean up into Oregon. So he was the foreman of the section crew, I guess. But they didn't move to Sparks until 1906 or 1907 to establish the division point in Sparks. [The Southern Pacific railroad moved its division point to Sparks in 1904.] They had a kind of a hotel there like.

*What about Dayton? Did Dayton have any Italian hotels or bars?*

Oh, yes. Dayton had 2 or 3. I can't tell you their names.

*Did you used to go out to Dayton very often?*

Not very often, no. I never did travel this state very much or any place, because I was working all the time. There's a lot of places in this state that I haven't been. They ask me here now, "Why don't you go to Italy or go where you was born?"

I says, "Why do I want to go over there?" "I says, "They are people over there just the same as they are here. They're no different. They're only human beings is all they are." See how I've been? There's a lot of towns in this state that I've never been there.

*Yes. Well, there was a fairly big group of Italians in Dayton, wasn't there—ranchers and others?*

Ranchers. And they worked in the mines. Mostly ranchers. And they were mostly Toscanos.

*What about around Carson City or Gardnerville? Were there any Italians out that way?*

Well, very few. That Carson Valley is mostly a German settlement.

*What about Yerington and that country? Do you know anything about that?*

Yerington was quite a few Italian...Toscani. They moved from here out to Yerington. One of them, his sister was beauty queen at one time—Montelaci\*.

*And he was Toscano?*

He owned a hotel. The old man moved from here, and he ended up owning a hotel and an eating place, regular Italian style.

*In Yerington there?*

In Yerington. I went out there one time: the first firemen's convention was in Yerington, and I was a delegate. And I went in and talked to Mrs. Montelaci. I took a girl that I knew in Loyalton, California—McKinley. I took her all around.

*There were quite a few Italians out there in Yerington, right?*

Yes. Mostly Italians in the whole town of Yerington. They were in all the business; they even had the stores—grocery stores and hardware stores. And the ranchers were mostly all Italians from Toscana—Toscani, we called them. There's quite a few of them from here went out there.

*They lived here first, then they went out there?*

Yes.

*Why did they do that?*

I don't know. Because they just happened to. They must have been all from the same community in Italy, I suppose.

*So they just started going out to Yerington?*

Yes. There were some who were relatives to the Quilici family up here. I forget their name. Some of them were in Dayton.

*And the Quilicis are Toscani?*

Yes.

*What about Fallon? Were there very many Italians in Fallon?*

No, not too many. There were some up in Gerlach.

*Working up there in the mines or at Basic? What were they doing?*

They worked on the railroad.

*Oh, yes. That was a division point, too, wasn't it, or at least a stopover on the railroad, where they changed crews and all that, right there in Gerlach?*

That's right.

*Yes, because I used to work out at Gerlach for the state of Nevada in the summers, and the railroad crew would come through every night.*

Yes, I think they did. In later years they changed crews, because years ago they used to work many hours. They changed, really, at Portola, [California], I think.

*Yes. I think they had Portola, and then there was Flanigan, [Nevada]; they'd stop at Flanigan. Then I think after Flanigan maybe the next stop was Gerlach, going across that desert there. I don't think there's anything between Flanigan and Gerlach.*

Years ago, they worked long hours. And then when they had to change crews, that's when they shortened up the hours. So maybe they did in Gerlach. It wasn't a division point.

*No, not a division point.*

*You've mentioned to me about how you got called dagos and wops. Tell me something about that? What it was like to be an Italian in Reno in those early days.*

Well, you'd be surprised; we were looked down upon.

*For what? Why?*

Even some of the people, so-called American, here used to call us.... For instance, on the railroad it was mostly all Italian—Toscani, like Lino Del Grande's father who was the foreman here. And Tuccori, and I don't know. Every 5 miles there was a section, a section house, and a section foreman and a crew of men to work on the railroad. And they were called dagos by the non-Italians.

*Why did they call them dagos? Where did they get that word? Do you know?*

That I don't know. Really, a dago—a slang word, I think it is—is mostly a Spaniard.

*Yes. But there weren't very many Spaniards around here, were there?*

No. Not many. And [the Italians] were mostly from Tuscany.

*Yes. And dago was a bad word?*

Yes. Then later on, they changed it to wop...called you a wop. Now, I don't know where that name came from. But you'd be

surprised the feelings that there was by the so-called white people against the Italians. It was terrible!

*What did they used to say or do? I mean, would they insult you to your face?*

Even us young men, we'd go attend these public dance halls. There used to be public dance halls, like Tony's El Patio Ballroom. Every Sunday, you took your whole family to the dance here...this and that. They had a dance hall over here by the river. We used to get into awful arguments, especially the young men: "He's nothing but a dago. Oh, he's nothing but a wop." See. It was quite a bit of that feeling way back. I think they got away from a whole lot of that about after the Second world War. You don't hear no more of that.

*You don't get that any more?*

No, but you'd be surprised the feelings. Remember that quite a few of us resigned the fire department in Reno.

*Right. You told me about that.*

That's what caused it, mostly.

*Really, the anti-Italian feeling?*

Anti-Italian it was. All the Italians quit. We all resigned—of course, with some of the other boys, also. Out of 41, I think about 30 of us resigned all at one time.

*Out of 41 firemen altogether, or 41 Italian firemen?*

Forty-one firemen, altogether. I think it was about 30 because there was 2 Mosconis,

there was 2 Zuninos, there was a Vietti, a Moroni.. .there was quite a few of us.

That was the feeling that there was because it was brought up to Professor Billinghamurst. He used to stop and talk to the old chief that would hire most of us, Hawcroft. So Professor Billinghamurst says to him—because Lee Hawcroft told me—he even said, "Why is it that there's quite a bit of talk that there's a whole lot of Italians in here?" And most of them were born in Reno. See? See what feelings there were?

*And what'd the chief say?*

And the chief says, "Well, when there's no fires, and all of the know-how and the baloney that goes on around here about my men—the so-called Americans are up front. But," he says, "when that alarm rings, then's when the Italians come to the front." And he says, "That's what I want." So, that's just the words that he told Billinghamurst.

Did you know Joe and Vic Suterno?

*No, it's not a familiar name.*

Joe's dead; Vic is still alive there. Their father made a lot of money in Bank of Italy stock; bought lots of stock. He was a foreigner. Came over here from Italy, and he had 2 boys, very well educated. They moved here to Reno, and they retired here.

*OK. Let's get back now to your family, Joe. You were telling me about your family's moving from Loyalton onto the Marks ranch.*

Oh, yes.

*So you came down from Loyalton to get that ranch?*

Yes.



*And how did you find it? How did you know about that ranch?*

Well, he came up after us. Mr. Marks was living in Stockton then, and he had the ranch leased to someone. I think he had it leased to a man by the name of Zunino, and it was Zunino who gave up the ranch. So he came up to Loyalton because I had moved the family from Stockton up to Loyalton.

*Right.*

So he came up there and wanted us to take that ranch. I still had that contract over there, and I left that contract to my other partner.

*Were you going to buy or lease the ranch?*

No, just lease it. And that was in 1925 or 1926. I leased that ranch, and then we had part of the Caughlin ranch....

*Do you remember how much you had to pay for the lease up there, in those days?*

I think it was \$1,200.

*Twelve hundred a year?*

Yes.

*And how big a place was it?*

About 300 acres, there where Bob Cashell lives and all of them people up there. They got a name for it now.

*Juniper Hills?*

Yes! That's it. It started right from the South Verdi Road and from there on clean up to Juniper Hills. Yes.

*What did you raise in there? What did you ranch?*

We planted potatoes and wheat and hay. Then we bought a dairy—the ranch just above us, up there where Hunter Creek reservoir is at.

In fact, one of these Borsi brothers that used to haul the wood—contractors—they ended up owning that ranch when they left that country up there. Then when they sold that ranch, they moved back to Italy—the whole family, even the Sons; they were graduates of university here, I think.

What was those people's name from Sierra Valley? They were Swiss-Italian.

*And they had a ranch up above you there?*

Yes, up above. I bought the old Borsi ranch, so I bought the dairy from these people.

*What do you mean you bought the dairy?*

I bought all the milk cows.

*Do you remember how many cows they had?*

Just roughly, about 25 cows.

*Do you remember what you had to pay for them?*

I don't remember. See, I'm the one that had the money. I was making the money over there in Loyalton.

*So what did you do with those dairy cows?*

We milked them and- then sold the milk to the Sam Murray dairy. You know where the park is at in Reno?



*Idlewild?*

Idlewild Park, yes.

Yes.

He had dairy there. We used to sell the milk to Sam Murray. We also used to separate the milk and then sell the cream in 10-gallon milk cans. When that was full, why, we'd ship it to the Crystal Creamery in Sacramento.

There were dairies all over these mountains up here in the summertime.

*Did you take your cows in the mountains in the summertime?*

No, no. We had a big pasture right there. See, there's quite a pasture up on that hillside up there. We used to irrigate it from the Steamboat Canal. And we milked them all by hand, twice a day. Mother used to come down, and she could beat us all milking those cows.

*Your dad, would he help?*

No. My dad didn't like it. He was doing the irrigating. But my mother'd come down there, and she could milk a cow—if it took me 10 minutes, she could do it in 5 minutes. Man!

*And who else milked?*

Well, my brothers.

*Your brothers were living with you at the time?*

Oh, yes.

*How many brothers?*

Well, 2 of my younger brothers were there. My brother, George, didn't stay with us very much; he was still working in the sawmills—my brother next to me. But my 2 younger brothers...in fact, Henry ended up being the justice of the peace here. He's passed away now. He used to ride a bicycle to Reno; he went to high school in Reno. He used to ride from the Marks ranch to Reno. Now if they have to walk 2 blocks, they...

*They complain about it?*

Yes.

*Did you have sisters living there with you?*

Yes. We had 2 sisters.

*So there were 5 in the family living at home at this time?*

One of the sisters ended up down in Stockton, going to school down there.

*While you were living at the Marks place?*

Yes.

*Staying with your uncles down there?*

Yes. And my oldest sister married Bill Candido and, of course, left there. Then my younger sister also married—a fellow [Ernie Zunino] from Reno here. She's still alive here; she lives in Verdi and owns property here in Verdi. She has one son that owns a grocery store down here. The other son was graduated from the college over in Susanville.

*From Lassen College?*

Yes. He ended up in the service. He married an Austrian girl from over there—very well-known person. He was in business over there, and now he owns some businesses in Reno here; he moved back to Reno.

*Was the Zunino family that your sister married into the same family as had the Marks ranch before you did?*

No. There's several Zunino families even here now that are not related. In fact, 2 of the boys [were] born in Italy, and the other 3 boys were born here. Then 2 of the young...I don't know whether one of the young ones died here— one died in Italy. But the youngest boy [Elmo]—he'd be my brother-in-law's brother—was quite a character around here, quite a deer hunter. In the world war...our last war...why, he was shot over there by those Germans. He was one of the sharpshooters.

*But one of them over there got him?*

Yes. I was here at the ceremonies. The government shipped him over here for the services. Yes, Elmo; he was quite a kid. Crack shot, oh.

*Yes, I grew up with Kenny Zunino in Reno. His family lived on Forest Street. His father was a bartender in Reno, but I can't remember his name. I think they were related to the Leonesio family in Reno.*

I knew the Leonesios well.

*How long did you have that Marks ranch?*

Two years? I think 2 or 3. And then that's when they shut the water off on us.

*Shut the water off?*

Yes.

*How come? [laughter]*

Certain time they only allowed us so much water. We had the agreement with Mr. Marks it was so much a year that we paid, and I think we only paid him \$800 that year.

*Because they shut the water off?*

Because they shut the water off. Well, they didn't shut it off altogether, but they curtailed only so much. That's when they were pumping out of Lake Tahoe.

*Because there was a drought?*

They had a drought. They had diesel pumps up there. Now, what year was that, 1927? Yes. I think right after that we left, because then I had part of the Caughlin ranch, and I had also part of the Mayberry ranch, where all them houses are built in there. I had all potatoes in there.

*Let's talk a little bit about that. But first let me ask you, on the Marks ranch did you have any hired help working for you, or was it just the family?*

No, it was just the family. We never hired anybody. But the neighbors would. When we were haying, sometimes we'd help the neighbors, and then they'd come up, and they'd help us. Things like that. But we never hired anybody.

*Do you remember who your neighbors were?*

Yes. The Schiappacasse family, right below us there.

*So they were Italian, too?*

They're Italian. Oh, yes. Schiappacasse. They're still there. You know that ranch [along] Mayberry [where] all them homes are?

Yes.

Just this side there's the old Piretto ranch. That was a 25-acre ranch—that's all homes. And then there's that open field there?

Yes.

That's the Schiappacasses. They still won't sell that land. Everybody wants to buy it and build homes.

*And they were from north Italy, too?*

Yes, they're Genovesi, I think.

*So those years that you were at the Marks ranch, did you ever work off the ranch, too, or did you just work right there on the ranch the whole time?*

I was supervising the Caughlin ranch. I leased it from Mrs. Crissie Caughlin.

*The same time you were at the Marks ranch?*

Yes. Then, also, I had part of the Mayberry ranch. See, the Capurro family that owned all that land just east of Lawton Springs, they also owned the Mayberry ranch. They had those potatoes in there, so they turned the potato field over to me.

*Did they pay you a salary? How did you do that?*

No, we was to divide 50-50 on the potatoes.

*So they gave you the land, and you put in the potatoes?*

Well, no, the potatoes were already planted, and then they couldn't handle it, so they turned it over to me.

*Why couldn't they handle it?*

I knew irrigating and all that. I don't know; they couldn't find any help or something. But they turned it over to me.

*And you weren't going back up to Loyaltown at that time?*

No. I spent all my time on these ranches, yes.

*What about the Caughlin place? How did you get that one?*

Well, Mrs. Caughlin rented the lower part from the road to the river. She leased that to me on...I think that was on a 50-50 basis, too. I even stayed there; there was a little house there. I even stayed there myself. See, I was single.

*But did you still have the Marks ranch then?*

Yes.

*So you rented all 3 of them at the same time?*

Yes. My father was taken up there, and my brothers were milking the cows, and I was taking care of irrigating that ranch and this ranch and...oh, yes.

*You must have been really busy, then?*

Oh, yes. I'll say I was! Work never scared me! No, I was never afraid of nobody.

*I can see that.*

That's what was the matter.. I'd tackle anything.

*So how long did you have the Caughlin ranch and the Mayberry ranch?*

We had them just for one year, I think, just that one season. I'd cut the hay, and I stacked the hay...yes, and the potatoes. I sold the hay to Mr. Mapes, this young Charley Mapes's\* father.

*Why did Mapes want to buy that hay from you?*

Well, he had cattle on the Mapes ranch down there by Sparks. His father was a president of the Washoe County Bank one time, this fellow here.

*Yes. I think he or his grandfather was a sheepman or something around here at one time, too...I think up in northern Washoe County.*

They had a ranch up out of Likely, up there by Susanville

*Yes. I think that was a sheep outfit at one time.*

Well, that was a Mapes...a brother. It would be an uncle to this young Charley Mapes here now.

I sold the hay to Mr. Mapes, and he came up and measured the hay. We used to stack the hay in big stacks with a derrick and a hay fork—hold it up there...whoo! Big long stack. So he come up and measured the hay with me. I had to watch him because....

*He was probably watching you, too.*

Well....

*You were probably watching each other, weren't you? [laughter]*

I'd measure that stack before. We measured the width, the length and one third of the over. And divide it by...what is it, 12? I used to be able to figure a ton.

*That's how you got a ton of hay, by that formula?*

We'd figure a ton of hay. Anyway, I told him, "Pull that tape down to the ground, Mr. Mapes!" He was a banker! Yes. And I sold it to him for \$5 a ton! *Five dollars a ton!*

*Delivered?*

No. Right there.

*He had to come get it?*

Yes. There was a feeding corral there. I think he hauled the steers in and fed them right there.

*But after that the drought came, you couldn't get enough water for those ranches?*

Well, they cut us short of water, so we lost a lot of crops.

*Couldn't...?*

...give them sufficient water. Oh, they watched us; they only let us use water just so many hours, and that was it. And it was *terrible* here; it was terrible. They had big diesel pumps, and we had to pay for so many miner's inches of water.

See, then we got our water by miners inches. It's a square inch with a 6-inch pressure. Well, say, you had [a box] 10 square inches—one inch deep and 10 inches long. Then you had a 6-inch pressure here—a 1-by-6 across here in the box. There's one inch this way and 10 inches this way. Then you had this 6-inch up here, and you'd let the water come in here, and the water'd just barely....

*Just touch that, and whatever would come out down below, that was the pressure?*

This here'd be the pressure. Six inches of pressure. That's how they measured.

*And they really were careful about it?*

Oh! Well, even when we moved over [to] that ranch over here, the power'd go up at night and check to see that I didn't lift up that gate. We had an awful time here.

I've seen quite a drought here. And it didn't only happen once; it happened several times. And it's going to happen again.

That's when we had a meeting [with] Senator Patrick McCarran—one of our greatest senators!—up in his office in the Clay Peters Building. They've torn that building down. I think it's a parking lot now. We were going to go up to Lake Tahoe, and we were going to blast that fat old rock there, because we wanted to get more water, but we couldn't do it. No, sir. But *one foot of water* off of that lake...see, that's a natural reservoir...that one foot of water would've had *all* the water we wanted here, and wouldn't've hurt the lake a bit.

*But they wouldn't let you do it?*

But the people that built down to the shores of the lake—the biggest mistake that our government ever done, to let them build

down there. In Canada you can't build down to the shores of the lake, to the level of the water! You got to be so far back.

Now, like this year, look at all the water that's going down...where is it going? Down to Pyramid. We could store all of that water up there, see. It's going to cause a flood because they don't want that water to get any higher than so-and-so houses built right down there.

*Right! [laughter]*

Oh, I tell you! I don't know if they're ever going to correct that. But they let the people build down too close to the level of the water.

*So you had real tough times because of that—just couldn't get enough water?*

Yes.

*Did a lot of Italian farmers here go out of business then?*

Well, a lot of them just quit. They had to. People that had the ranch rented, the owner... had to deal with him. And say [the rent was] like \$1,200, we only gave him \$800. And we had an awful time getting the \$800. We lost a lot of money. And like potatoes...if you don't irrigate them right, you're going to lose! They'd be deformed and everything else—you're going to have a lot of waste. And the hay doesn't grow as good' either. You get less tons to the acre, see. Then the pasture... your cows...your pasture's not doing so good, either. That water can....

*Kill you, right?*

Oooh.

*Well, did Marks get upset with you when you only gave him the 800?*

Yes. He was going to sue us, and he was going to do this, and he was going to do that. And he couldn't do nothing with it. I told him, I said, "You just go ahead and sue."

I went down and talked to an attorney, and he said, "Well, he broke his contract."

*Marks broke his contract?*

Sure.

*Because he didn't give you enough water?*

So much land and so much water. Get it?

*Yes. But, anyway, you left; you gave him back the ranch?*

Yes. He finally sold the ranch. We could've bought the whole ranch for \$5,000. Could've bought the town of Verdi for \$5,000.

*Yes! [laughter]*

All of that there now...one acre, I'll guess you'd have to pay maybe \$50,000!

*I'm sure you would.*

See, young man, we can't see what's going to happen tomorrow. Nobody can tell you. The one that owns it at that time, [he's] just lucky, but he didn't know that that was going to happen.

Yes.

That ranch over there...Lawrence Devincenzi bought that for \$5,000 from the bank during the bank failure in the 1930s. They're multimillionaires over there. One of those houses built on the shores of the river, where it looks down into the river—I think it's an acre—he either paid \$80,000 or \$120,000.

Yes.

Just think. The cheapest acre.. Filberto Ferroni was going to give us the cemetery over there.

*You mean give it to the people of Verdi?*

Yes. Then all the rest of that about 70 acres or so, he's going to call it Sunrise. That's just a portion, because he owns better than 2,000 acres. You're not going to buy [one acre for] less than, I'd say, \$50,000—from there on up—all that sagebrush out there.

*Yes! [laughter]*

We sold it for \$40,000 to a divorcee.

*You sold the whole ranch for \$40,000? Two thousand acres?*

No, no. We had about 300 acres. The rest of it they accumulated later on.

[The grandfather of] Karen Kronish Ferroni—Filberto's wife—was a New York banker. He started to bank during the Depression, or way before that. He also had a construction outfit that built the town of Henderson for the government. So when he got paid from the town of Henderson he bought land, land, land—everything that he could buy—and especially in this western country. He started a bank in during the Depression; they tell me that you could even deposit 50 cents. He was Jewish.

*Let's go on back, Joe. When you gave up that Marks place, what did you do? Where did your family go when you left Marks?*

We moved down at Mogul first; we stayed there for a while.



*What did you do at Mogul?*

My father was working for the power company, and that's what I was doing, too. I worked for Bill Beswick; he had Lawton's rented. I worked there for a while. I worked for the power company, myself, cleaning these ditches.

*Was that before or after you had been in Loyalton and on the Marks ranch?*

This was after that. Then we moved back here to Verdi; and we had the company ranch over here—the Sierra Pacific Power Company ranch that's where the schoolhouse was built, where the park land is at. We leased that ranch.

*How did you hear about that one?*

There was a fellow by the name of Thomas...Portuguese... that had a dairy there. That's where we moved; we moved from the Marks ranch to that ranch over there.

*You didn't go to Lawton?*

We moved our dairy and all to this ranch over here. And then from there we bought the Donner Trail ranch.

*Well, let's talk a bit about the company ranch. How did you find out about it? I mean, why did you go there?*

Mr. Thomas, he quit. He moved down to the Besso ranch. Besso ranch is just the other side of Chalk Bluff, up on the hill there.

*So that left this one vacant? Do you remember what you had to pay for the company ranch?*

I think around \$1,200, something like that; I forget.

*How big was this one?*

Oh, this was about 200 acres, roughly.

*What did you do there?*

Mostly a dairy.

*You've said that at one time there were 20 dairies between Verdi and Reno?*

Yes. And now there's not a one.

*Why do you think that's true?*

Well, because the manure from the cows was going into the river.

*And people didn't like that?*

Well, and the health department.... You see, there's no more old-time thinking any more. There's no more dairies. They're going to build houses here and houses there and houses over there. And the dairies were food—food for us people.

So now they got horses. There's horses everywhere! Where does the horse manure go?

*In the river? [laughter] Same place the cow manure used to!*

Then they take horse manure and cow manure, and they spread it on the lawns! So the grass will grow. Where does that go when you irrigate? Don't that go in the river?

*[laughter]*

Get what I mean?

Yes.



And you want to grow some potatoes in your garden or lettuce or tomatoes or something. You put cow manure or horse manure in it, don't you?

*Sure.*

Then where does that go when you irrigate?

*How many cows did you used to have? What was the most cows that you'd have at one time?*

We used to milk about 30.

*But you said you had beef cows, too?*

Oh, yes. We had a couple of hundred.

*You'd leave those up in the hills?*

They'd range all up...yes...with the bulls. We had a couple of bulls and then so many heifers, so many cows that we kept from year to year; they'd have calves. Then the steers, we'd castrate them, and then when they were old enough, we'd bring them down kind of early—let the steers feed off the third crop [hay], which up in this altitude you don't harvest.

*Not too good, right?*

Very seldom get a third crop; you just get maybe 6 or 8 inches. The cattle that's been in that range all summer can come down and eat that and will not bloat. But if you turn one of our milk cows out in that tender alfalfa, they bloat. But those animals that've been up there on that mountain all summer eating that high-protein grass, because that grass up there has got more protein in it than down here—the higher the altitude, the more

protein it has in it.... Why is it that they can come down here and eat this right down to the roots and never bloat?

*I don't know.*

No gas forms in their stomach. Then we had the fattening corrals. That's when they'd go in the corrals, and we fed them hay twice a day—in the morning and in the evening.

*This is in the fall?*

In the fall of the year. They always stayed in that corral. You know where Boomtown is at right now?

*Yes.*

That used to be a big fattening corral there for the Christiansens and Garsons and all of them. Some of them, in about 2 months, with my dad they would walk through these steers—mostly steers, and some cow that we tried to make a milk cow out of and we couldn't tame her, so we made a beef out of her! That's what we ought to do with some of these people, too.

*[laughter]*

They'd walk through and look at every steer. If they'd be lying down, make them get up. When they got so fat, that was it.

*They wouldn't get fatter.*

Oh, because they can die. There's a lot of people that didn't watch them, and sometimes they'd go out and find 2, 3 of them dead.

*Whew! That was a big loss!*

Overweight. Oh, my dad would show us, and we'd mark them, see, with something—that one there and that one there and that one there—and we had to haul them down to the slaughterhouse or drive them down.

*Where was the slaughterhouse?*

There was a slaughterhouse out on Moana. Then there was a slaughterhouse down on Alameda [now Wells Avenue] and Fourth—big slaughterhouse—Nevada Packing Company. You know where the overpass is at?

Yes.

Do you know that restaurant that's right there?

Yes.

Well, that's where the slaughterhouse used to be. We even went down there. From down here, the other side of the River Inn—we had a little ranch there—and my brother went down there with 2 horses and a wagon and got manure out of the corrals and hauled it.

*All the way back up?*

That's how precious manure was. We didn't buy fertilizer in bags; we went and got it with a wagon and horses. What I went through.

*What about sheep? Did you used to have sheep?*

Yes, we had some sheep, too.

*Very many?*

No, just a few. Didn't have many sheep because they were too hard to take care of. You had to watch them, and then you had to keep them in a closed....

*Yes. You just raised those for yourself to eat?*

Yes. And we had some goats, too. Where I was born in the Alps of Italy, we had mostly goats and cows—milk goats. That's how the people lived; they lived off of the milk from the goats, and then the young goats that they didn't want to keep, why, we butchered them.

And the cows, I can still remember, way over there when they build a home, a building—of course, that's where all the stonemasons come from; there was no lumber there; it was all stone—here would be the cow barn. Then we'd live upstairs.

*You'd live above the cow barn?*

Above the cow barn.

*That was here in Verdi?*

No, not in Verdi. In Italy. And those cows were better taken care of than human beings. Because here the cows were in their stanchion—here, one there—depends on how many you had. Then here was the back end of the cows, and there was straw here. And do you know that the women were there knitting?

*They'd sit behind the cows?*

They didn't need no heat! Those cows produced the heat. And us kids were playing here. And when a cow done her...you know what I mean?

Yes.

Emptied herself? That was everything right there; the straw and everything else was cleaned up and taken away.

*Every time?*

Every time! And it was cleaner than here!

*So it was almost like a living room or something, and the cow right in the living room.*

The people lived right in back of those cows because that was the heat from the animals.

*Did they have a kitchen right there, too? Cook the food there?*

No. My grandfather had a courtyard.

*This was over in Italy you're talking about?*

Over in Italy, yes.

*Here you didn't do that, though?*

No. We didn't do that here. Here we had wood stoves. Yes.

*Did they used to make charcoal for the wood stoves and for cooking and heating? Did you used to make your own charcoal, sometimes?*

Well, no. We made a lot of charcoal in Truckee.

*You told me about that up in that valley.*

Yes, up in Euer Valley. But not here they didn't make much charcoal. It was all big pot-

bellied stoves that they had. Then they had fancy kitchen stoves. We bought one one time. The fellow used to drive around here with a horse and a buggy selling stoves.

*He had a stove right on the buggy?*

No. He had the picture of the stove. Oh, what was the name of that stove? I bought one in 1926 when we moved here from Loyalton down on the Marks ranch. It was a *beautiful* stove. Oh! And it was known all over the United States, this make of stove. It even had a boiler. Did you ever see an old stove?

*Yes, with the water boiler?*

Water boiler on the sides—called it the reservoir. I think it had 6 openings and an oven. Oh, man. That was really something.

*Really a fancy stove?*

Oh.

*When you were on the company ranch, did you grow any vegetables or potatoes?*

No. It was mostly all dairy. We cut some hay, of course, for the cows. You know where those factories are down here now?

Yes.

That was all pasture there.

*And that was part of that company ranch?*

Yes. On the other side of the road where the grocery store is, we used to cut hay there. There was an Indian camp there, besides; quite a few Indians living there.

*How long did you stay on that company ranch?*

Two years or 3 years; I forget.

*Did you do any work other than just the ranch there, or did you work for wages anywhere at the same time?*

This was in October 1929. From there I joined the Reno Fire Department.

*What about fishing and hunting? Did you used to do a lot of fishing and hunting? You talk about not going to the store and growing your own food and all.*

Yes, I used to do quite a bit of hunting. Fishing, too. I remember I used to go fishing up there, and there was a little old shack down there, where Incline Creek enters the lake.

*You used to go fishing in that creek?*

Oh, yes. I'll say I used to go fishing in there. Trout...that long...come up from the lake to spawn.

*It's good fishing in there, then?*

Oh. Then there's a spot on the lake; I used to fish that lake, too, for the mackinaw. The mackinaw were planted here from Lake Michigan. They were planted here by...Congressman or Senator...from Lake Michigan. They're not native trout up there.

*Well, I knew they weren't native.*

There's a ridge out there, straight out from Incline Creek; that's where we used to have to have a copper line because....

*It was big?*

Yes. You had to go down deep.

*Would you go down here on the river to go fishing?*

Yes, and even up above Lake Tahoe, up in them lakes way up above—Dicks Lake and Kalmia Lake and all them lakes up there. Tony Polona that died just the other day...remember Tony Poloni used to be a prize fighter?

*Oh, yes.*

He was a policeman for a good many years. A hell of a nice fellow—very, very honest and all. I used to take him up and show him all them high lakes. We used to walk in there, and Dicks Lake is right up on the divide up above Emerald Bay. There's a little house built out there on that little island. It was Laura Knight's teahouse. She built Vikingsholm, now a California state park.

Yes.

Right up above there you could walk clean up [to] Dicks Lake and Azure Lake and Kalmia Lake and Frog Lake—all that full of lakes up there where you could look right down in the American River.

We were fishing on this side of Dicks Lake, and there was a bear over on the other side of the lake down there drinking. A big black bear. He didn't pay any attention to us.

Mostly, my hunting was when I was in the fire department. You see, I was a hell of a walker, and nobody wanted to go with me because I could out-walk all of them. That's how I kept in shape from the fire department too, and I used to hunt. Loved to hunt.

*Did you go deer hunting, mainly?*

Mostly deer.

*What about birds? Did you hunt birds, too?*

Oh, yes.

*Ducks and geese?*

Ducks down in Winnemucca Lake. Tony Petronovich and I and John Questa and Sam Sabini. I bought the first balloon tires that was sold in Reno, and we drove over Winnemucca Lake over on the east side because the sand—you couldn't go in there with small tires.

Yes.

That's why I bought those tires. That's when I was in the fire department. You see, Winnemucca Lake in area is larger than Pyramid, but it's not as deep. It is a dry lake now.

Yes.

And you know what the limit was? Twenty-five ducks. So we came away from there with 125 ducks—S hours.

But deer. Pretty near every year I won the prize in the Reno Fire Department from getting the biggest buck. Up on slide Mountain where they had that slide, that's where I used to kill most of my big bucks...way up above the slide. You know where the slide is at, facing southeast. Way up above, there's a lot of mahogany up there, but the mahogany..here's a stem and there's hardly any branches on this side...the wind is so strong that I call them half mahoganies. And they're not very tall. There's a spring within not many feet from the tip-top. How in the hell does that water get up there?

*Boy, that's a good question.*

I brought that up many times; nobody could give me an answer. Is it the pressure of Lake Tahoe; it's 1,600 feet deep.

*I don't know.*

That's where I used to catch the Mr. Buck. That's where he'd stay, right up there. He had a big bed—I found the bed—underneath this mahogany. Then he had a little trail going over to that spring. They love mahogany. A cow even. Our milk cows used to eat mahogany; then we could taste it in the milk. My mother didn't like it.

But, anyway, when I'd kill that deer, I'd clean him out and everything else. Then I'd sew him up. Then I'd start him down right at the head of the slide—you can't walk down there. So I'd tie a rope around his horns, and I'd head him down there, with the butt end. When you get to the slide, I'd shake him and shake him and shake him and pretty soon zzzt...away he'd go! He would build up with sand and would stop. He'd slide down there maybe from here to the street...say, 50 feet. Then I'd get down on my back with my rifle up here and my canteen up here and...zzzt...man, I'm telling you, it's straight down!

*So you'd slide down to the deer?*

I'd go down to the deer; then I'd shake the deer again like that, and...zzzt...down he'd go. That's how I got the deer down there! I didn't have to pack him up over.

*But at that point, you're all the way down there at Price's Lake. How did you get him out from back of the lake?*

No, I was just this side of Price's Lake. You see, the slide, when it slid this time, it slid just a little bit more to the southwest and went

down and filled up Price's Lake and Stony Lake—not Rock Lake—*Stony* Lake; that's the real name for it. Stony Lake is right below Price's Lake.

You know why they call it Stony Lake? Because it's all full of big rocks on the bottom of the lake.

Then I'd have the wife; see, she'd leave [the vehicle] up on top of the....

*The highway up there?*

The pass—8,000 feet high. Then I'd walk up like this, and she'd drive around and meet me down to Bowers Mansion.

*And you'd bring that deer all the way out to Bowers Mansion?*

No, I'd bring that deer down below Price's Lake, down to the creek. Then I'd lay the deer up on a big high rock there or on the log or something. The deer'd be there all night.

The next day I would go out and I'd come over here and get my old saddle horse, a little black and white mare that we had here—beautiful mare. I'd come over and get Babe. Go out and haul her out there in a trailer and go up and load the deer on Babe and go down and load her on the trailer with the deer. That's how I used to get my deer. And *nobody* could find where I got my deer!

But one year, see, here I got my Model A coupe. Fancy coupe with a rumble seat in the back—1930. So I parked right on top of the summit, because the ladies afterwards were coming up—my wife and somebody else—and they were going to get the car and then come around the other way. Somebody knew that I was getting my deer up in that area—those big bucks. They followed my tracks in the dirt, followed me up there. And

here I am down there sneaking down under these mahoganies and pretty soon I heard, "Hello, Joe!"

*They followed you right in there and messed you up? [laughter]*

I won some of the—I won prizes for some of the biggest bucks in the country. [laughter]

*And every year there would be one big buck up in there?*

There's some big beauties up in there.

*And they always like right there on that very highest part of Slide Mountain?*

Well, it was cooler there, and there's that spring, and nobody bothers them or anything else. I don't know, now, with all of that skiing outfit and like that. I suppose they've probably got trails all over there and everything.

I can't figure out *how* can that water...and that water would only flow, well, maybe from here to the street.

*From that spring?*

Yes. And then it disappeared. Could there be enough snow up above, see, to percolate down to make that spring? I don't know. It's kind of hard to believe, though, that the pressure of the water would pump that water clean up there. I don't think so.

*Yes. When you were out here in Verdi on the farms and the ranches and all, did you have bees?*

No. Some of them did but not very [many]. You know what we done with bees? We used to go and steal their honey.



*Oh, you'd go out and get wild bees?*

Yes. Every once in a while we'd be riding through the hills up there on horse because we raised our cattle in Dog Valley and all that—that is, the beef cattle. We also had beef cattle besides the milk cows. And we'd see a bunch of bees...oh—it's a bee tree!

*OK. Now, you said in 1929 you joined the Reno Fire Department?*

They come up and ask me if I wanted to join the fire department, so I went down and talked to the chief.

*Who came up and asked you?*

One of the firemen from Reno, Kenneth Tate.

*How did he know you or know about you?*

Well, they used to fight fires here; they used to come up with the first engine that was bought by the county, stationed in the Reno Fire Department. They'd come up and fight the fires here, and I was always there fighting fires, and so they was telling that chief there was a young guy out in Verdi—"Boy, he sure helps us!" They said that the chief, Lee Hawcroft, wanted to see me, so I went down there.

Everybody then wanted to live in the city, and here I was courting my going-to-be-my-first wife, and, naturally, here it was in the wintertime. I had my 2 younger brothers here; they were milking the cows. So I said, "Well, that'd be a good chance for me." I didn't figure on staying there.

*Was your first wife living in Reno at the time?*

Oh, yes. Then in June of this next year we married. She and I stayed there.

*You stayed right in Reno then?*

Yes. We got a house, and I stayed in the fire department for 15½ years.

*But you also bought that Donner Trail ranch at some time?*

Well, they bought the Donner Trail ranch when I was still in the fire department.

*Your family bought it?*

Here, I'll tell you how we got it. That's when the banks closed. My father-in-law owned the Eddy Floral Company. He was one of the leading florists of the state, really. Used to ship flowers in here by trainload because he had an interest in a big nursery down in Oakland. He used to take orders, and he'd ship flowers clean to Elko. He'd ship flowers to Winnemucca; he'd ship flowers to Loyalton and all over. He was a distributor.

*What was his name?*

Devincenzi. He has one son and 2 daughters still living. My first wife was his eldest daughter.

*Was Devincenzi born in Italy or here?*

He was born in Italy. He was a Reno policeman for years.

*What part of Italy was he born in?*

Genoa. He had 3 or 4 brothers down in Stockton; I met all of them. Two or 3 of them



were wealthy—they had big orchards down there, and they owned a lot of property. They had a lot of educated daughters and sons that graduated from universities down there. There's quite a few of them down there, yet.

*Why don't you tell me a little bit about how you met your wife and all that?*

Well, there used to be a flour mill on the 200 block of Winter Street. People by the name of Berrum. And they had a daughter and lived across the street from my future wife. In the basement of this flour mill they had a big room, and they used to invite us young men, and we'd have parties.

*Like dances?*

Dance in there. Well, I got invited.

*Did they have music and everything?*

They had music. They had one of those round phonographs. We'd dance in there. There was, oh, the Berrum girl and my wife and several girls there.

*What was your wife's name?*

Erma.

*And her father had a flower shop?*

He was head of the Eddy Floral Company in Reno, the leading floral store of Reno. And he put in a good many years as a Reno policeman; he retired from the police department. He had the flower store when he was still in the police department. And that's how I met ray wife.

*Did she used to work there in the florist shop?*

Oh, yes. Of course he had 3 people working in the flower store. My wife graduated from high school, and she was very efficient in keeping books and all that. Also, she was even good in making sprays and bouquets and things like that.

He didn't want me to marry his daughter. He didn't like me at first because he didn't want a gosh darn fireman marrying his daughter. I asked him for his daughter's hand, and he made a big fuss about it. "Well," I said, "there's no use making a fuss about it because," I said, "I'm man enough to come and ask you for your daughter. Just because I'm a fireman, that has nothing to do with it. It's a pretty good job right now. There's a lot of people out of work." And I says, "I'm going to treat your daughter...and she likes me, and you're not going to stop us." I told him, "I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm just asking you for your daughter." And I says, "I'm man enough to come and ask you."

Well, here he was considered pretty wealthy. And it's something that maybe I shouldn't say, but he was kind of backward in a lot of things. Bullheaded, shall I say? And he thought he was going to scare me.

I told him, "No. You can't scare me." I says, "To me, you're only a human being, that's all you are. And I respect you. But you can't stop me."

*He was retired from the police department at that time and had the floral shop?*

Yes. And even I says, "Just because you've been a policeman and such as that, that don't make no difference to me." Because I was afraid of nobody then.

*How old were you?*

Well, 1930...I was 31 years old.

*How old was Erma?*

She's 10 years younger.

*Oh, so she was pretty young, really?*

Yes. So I said to him, "I'm going to marry your daughter whether you like it or not." I said, "I'm man enough to ask you."

He considered me as a farmer—country boy. I knew how he felt...right away. Well, that didn't go good with me at all.

*Was there much feeling like that within the Italian community? I mean, the ones that lived in Reno and had town stores and things?*

The Italians, most of them in this country that I know of, all they were after was money. And if I was a millionaire who had a lot of money...had a hundred thousand dollars in the bank...then everything would've been all right.

*But you didn't have enough money?*

See, you'd be surprised what goes on with people! I can say that a hundred percent of them, that's just the way they feel.

Yes.

There was one of the Oppios. Still you hear of them yet; some of the boys are still alive. One of those Oppio girls lives in Reno. She has that antique shop up here. She wanted to marry one of my brothers, but because the Mosconis didn't have much money...oh, no! Man, you should've heard....

*Wouldn't let her do it?*

No. Same up here now. Now, wait a minute. The Garsons—Swedish people,

Norwegian—one of their daughters wanted to marry one of my nephews. Oh, no! But if my nephew's family'd had a lot of money, it'd have been all right. There was that feeling all the way through, everywhere.

*It was real strong, then?*

Well, not only the Italians...most all of the old people felt that way. They wanted their daughter to [marry] into money, some high-class family.

*Did they have dowries, too? Over in Europe lot of times, when the daughter gets married they have a dowry, and they give the daughter something to bring into the marriage. Did they do that here in Reno, too?*

Yes, they did. But they tell me that they had the same feeling in Italy, too. Or the European people....

*Yes, I know it's very European.*

Today, well, I don't know if they change much or not. Even today, if your daughter likes that nice, big, strong young man, and he is just a policeman or fireman—in other words he's a day worker—and there's that judge's son over there... I think it's that way even with the American-born people here. That's the background of most all of them. But the Italians... oh!

*They were really strong that way. Let me ask you another thing while we're talking about marriage and amongst the Italians and all. In those days, was there any feeling between north Italians and south Italians about getting married? Did they used to get married, or were there sometimes hard feelings there?*

That there is kind of forgotten, but not very much. The northern Italian didn't like the southern Italian at all. Ever any time that you go down past Tuscany...Toscani.... oh!

*Yes. Anywhere from there south is no good. [laughter] That was the same thing I saw in Australia—most of the north Italians didn't like the Sicilians, for instance, at all.*

They didn't?

*No. They didn't get along very well. If you were north Italian and your daughter wanted to get married to a Sicilian, oh, that was big trouble in the family. Like even more than the money. [laughter]*

Were you in Australia?

*Yes. I was down there for about a year.*

I've got cousins—I told you about that. My mother's side of the family went there, and my father came here.

*But I know a lot of Italians in Australia because I was doing a study of people who had gone down there from Italy, and there were real strong feelings between the northerners and the southerners.*

I don't know why I never did have that explained to me, clearly, why there was that feeling. I've talked to lots of Italians. The southern Italians wanted northern Italian. Especially the northern Italian male likes the female from the north. Why? But I never had that explained to me—why that there was a feeling like that in Italy. I can't figure it out. I guess there's those kind of feelings in other parts of the country.

*Oh, sure.*

But you saw some of that here, too. There was some of the north Italian families didn't want their daughters to marry....

*South Italians?*

Well, really from Rome on. They even call them black because they are darker complected than the northern Italian. They're mixed in with those Arabs is what they are, those Italians down at Tripoli and Eritrea and Somaliland—all down in through there. They are a different class of people; they're much more hot-headed, shall I say? They're very treacherous, some of them. And they have, well, a different temperament.

*Yes.*

Look at all of the bootleggers during Prohibition. And the Mafia and all that. I'd say 80 percent or more are southern Italians. They're afraid of nobody.

*Pretty tough guys?*

Yes, they are.

*On the fire department, were there any south Italians, or were they all north Italians when you were there?*

There was one [south Italian]. I think he was born in this country in Colorado... ranching people... [John] Nerone. He was from the south, somewhere. But the rest of them were all northern Italians. He was the only one that was a little dark...Johnny Nerone. He worked in this hospital, and he was married to a nurse, and then he was a bartender.

Mostly, the southern Italian was a barber or he was in business of some kind. He wasn't a manual labor man. None of them. They're city; they want to be barbers or things like that.. .musicians and everything. They were not loggers or ranch hands or worked for the power company or manual labor.

*Didn't like that at all?*

Oh, no.

*Was there ever any trouble around here, like with the Mafia or anything and the south Italians?*

No. The only trouble around here was Baby Face Nelson, and then.. .what was that kid's name? Fatso. I never did see him; he came here to do a job, and he was from southern Italy. Great big, fat fellow, and they knew him as Fatso. That's when they got rid of Roy Frisch—if you've ever read the story about the banker, Roy Frisch?

No.

There were 3 brothers, and he was president of the Riverside Bank. They closed him up, of course, but he was going to testify against 2 of our people from here that used the banks to beat a lot of people out of money, especially people from Canada. McKay and Graham—you probably read about that?

Yes.

That's during the Depression when they closed all the banks. They used the banks to do that, understand. The Wingfield banks. And Roy Frisch was president of the Riverside Bank, and he had to close, too, because the government closed all the banks. But he was

going to testify against these 2 persons. He disappeared, and we haven't found him yet.

That's when Baby Face Nelson was here, and Fatso was here. They're the ones that done the job with another man that put time in the penitentiary that had a garage here—Frank Cochran. He lived up on North Virginia Street, and he had an airplane. They don't know, but I think that's what happened. Frisch lived on Court Street [and was] walking to the theater, and that's when he disappeared. The talk was that they cemented him and then flew him over Lake Tahoe and dropped him in.

Now, Lefty Harding was a policeman, and we know that Baby Face Nelson was in that garage over there. [Lefty] says, "I know he's in there.

I said, "Why don't you go get him?"

He said, "You go get him."

Lefty Harding is dead now, but we've had that conversation. I used to ride around with the policemen when I was a fireman.

*They didn't want to go get him? [laughter]*

No. I used to play pool with Baby Face Nelson; he was a Reno kid. And Graham and McKay used him—they made him that way. They gave him all them beautiful clothes and all the money that he could pack and spend and all the beautiful women.

*Baby Face Nelson was a Reno kid?*

Yes. And they made the crook. They used to use him to haul the liquor in and all that, back and forth. He hauled liquor in here on the trains, on everything. Nice kid—good looking son-of-a-gun. They dolled him up and gave him all the money that he needed and all the beautiful girls, see. They made him. Well, they shot him...where is it? Back in Colorado or someplace.

*He was born in Reno?*

That I can't tell you.

*But he was around here quite a bit?*

He was a young man here, and McKay and Graham picked him to do all the dirty work, see. I seen plenty in Reno. Oh, man.

*When did you and Erma get married?*

I got married in June of 1930. I became 31 on the second day of April.

*Where did you go to live?*

We rented a house there in Reno.

*Right there by the fire station?*

No. It was one on Bell Street. We lived in 2, 3 different places.

*Was it just the 2 of you living there at first, or were there family members with you?*

Yes, just the 2 of us. And \$120 a month—that was a lot of money then. Then they gave us \$150—a raise. I forget when that was. Then after that, they took the \$30 away from us.

*They gave it to you for a while and then took it back?*

Yes. I'm pretty sure that's what it was. Well, \$30 away from \$150 is 20 percent. Now they're squawking down there because they took 3 percent away from them.

*Was your wife working, too, at the time?*

No.

*After you married, she just stayed home all the time?*

She'd go down and help them at the flower shop whenever they needed her. Then one day they called me, "Papa and Mama wants to talk to you." So I went up, and you know what they'd done? The house we were living in—they bought all new furniture for us.

*Just like that?*

Just like that! So I accepted it. I had to, especially on account of her. I had no feelings against him at all. But just because I was a farm boy...there's a lot of good farm boys.

*Yes, really.*

There's a lot of good policemen; there's a lot of good firemen—a lot of good other people, see.

I never did think too much of the father, but I always respected him all the time we were here in Verdi. The folks were at the ranch over there when we got notice that he passed away right in the store...heart attack. So I was right down there, and I done everything I could.

[Before that, though,] for a while, we even left the rented place and moved all the furniture up.... They had a big 2storey home [that] was built by one of the wealthy sheepmen...723 West Second Street. Beautiful home. One of the best homes in Reno at that time. So we moved upstairs.

*You mean your father-in-law had that place before?*

He bought it. That's where my wife lived, right on the corner of Winter and Second

Street. In the back of it was the Reno Flour Mill.

See, there used to be 2 flour mills in Reno one time, where they used to grind the wheat from the people here and make flour.

Yes.

There's one of the boys, Henry Berrum, still living; he's married a rich girl. He was married to Eneva and she passed away. Then he remarried to some wealthy German rancher's widow out in Carson Valley someplace. [There are] a lot of German people in Carson Valley. Henry Berrum—very nice, brilliant kid. His sister, Pauline Berrum—the one that was great friend of my first wife—was in Washington, D.C. She had a big job back there in the Congress. She passed away. In fact, I was her pallbearer.

*So you and your wife moved into the same house with her parents. How long would this have been after you got married?*

Wasn't very long. Let me see. We lived down over there the summer...I'll say maybe a year.

*Was your wife an only child, or did she have brothers and sisters?*

There's 2 sisters living and a brother, yet. My wife was the oldest of the family.

*How come your father-in-law wanted you to move back in there with them, if he still had kids and everything, and she was the oldest?*

I don't know. The mother, I guess, had a lot to do with it.

*She wanted the daughter to come home?*

Yes. Her mother died in my arms of heart attack. I worked on her and worked on her and worked on her. Too far gone.

*Where did you and Erma get married?*

Up in Carson.

*How come you went there? [laughter]*

Pauline Berrum and Erma went to the show. So they called me and said, "We'll be at the show."

"All right."

This was after hours, so I called Mr. [Elwood] Beemer, the county clerk. I didn't know it, but Mr. Devincenzi must have talked to Mr. Beemer to not give me a license, see.

*Oh. [laughter]*

So it's after hours, but Mr. Beemer used to go over there after hours, because he'd make side money. People would give him a tip, and he didn't have to register that certificate because it was after hours, and he kept it. He was the only county clerk, and he thought that he owned the county—big shot His nephew, maybe you know him...Bill?

*The judge?*

Yes, used to be the judge. He's a great friend of mine. He's from Sparks, originally.

Well, anyway, I called him. He answered and didn't ask who it was or anything else. So I asked him if he would give me a license. He said sure; says a certain time. So I goes over there and I walked in, and here he is and he gets his book out. He knew my name; hell, he knew my family. And he said, "Who's the bride going...."

I says, "Irma Marie Devincenzi."



He says, "I refuse to give you that."

*[laughter]*

Well, I said, "I respect you, Mr. Beemer." This, of course, was after hours. "But you can't refuse anybody on your license." And he done it illegal. But, of course, it was after hours.

*Yes, so he could say, "I'm closed."*

So I said, "All right. Fine and dandy. I figured that Mr. Devincenzi would talk to you. You and Mr. Devincenzi had discussed it. But," I said, "I want to tell you this. Why don't you call up Mr. Devincenzi right now and tell him that I'm on my way to Carson. Tell him to try and stop that! See, we're going to get married *tonight*, and I'm going to marry Irma in Carson City."

So, this other couple who we had with us, we went over to Carson City and got that judge out of bed. I tipped him a ten or twenty...I don't know; it was a lot of money then. So we got married.

*Did you own a car by then?*

Yes, I had a car—a Model A Ford.

*So Mr. Devincenzi wasn't exactly thrilled?*

No. But I could've got Mr. Beemer into a little trouble.

*Yes, I'll bet.*

But I said he had a right to come down there; he agreed to come down there. I could've forced him, right?

*Sure.*

That's discrimination.

*That's right. It's not up to him to decide who gets married.*

I told him, I said, "Listen, Mr. Beemer. I'm too much of a man to hurt you, but I sure can hurt you. Just because I'm a farm boy..." See, used to be a farm boy. I says, "Look Out!"

Oh, I was a tough son-of-a-gun; I was afraid of nobody. Well, here's the way I felt. I never done anything wrong in my life, see, and I was afraid of nobody. I didn't have to go and run behind the bush. No, I didn't.

*What happened after you got married like that? Didn't you have to come back here to Reno and see Mr. Devincenzi? Did you tell him or...?*

Well, no. She just told him that we got married and that was it. That's all. We had a house rented, already...

*So she just moved in there and that was that?*

That was that. The first thing, here's her brother—the third one. And then we kept the little baby sister. The first thing you know, why, she was turned over to us—whenever they'd go to Frisco or someplace—and we took care of the baby.

*Well, when Mr. Devincenzi passed away, did you think of going into the florist business?*

No. He had a son that studied to be an attorney. The boy didn't even want to. I think he sold the business. He closed it up and sold it. I don't know what happened right after that. The boy run it for a while, yes. The boy is in Reno now. He's been in 2, 3 businesses. He was also in the garbage business in Reno—



he and that rancher's son, [Jack] Caramella. Devincenzi and Caramella were partners.

My wife's father had 3 or 4 brothers in San Jose, and some of them were orchard people—had big orchards down there. Two of them, I think, were in the garbage business. That garbage business—they're all multimillionaires down there.

*That's a good business?*

Sure, it's a good business. Like in San Francisco. It was all Italians that was in the garbage business. And San Jose was all Italians—Devincenzi and his nephews and somebody else. They were all related, and they owned it, the whole thing. They were nothing but big, monied people.

And the garbage business is a good business here in Reno. Don't think it isn't.

*Yes, I'll bet it is.*

And that's another thing, talking about marrying who and this and that. Those garbage men, if they had sons or daughters, just because they were from garbage people, they had a lot of money. And if your son liked to marry that garbage man's daughter... oh, man. That was OK, because the garbage people had a lot of money.

*But they didn't want their kids to marry poor people or anything?*

Oh, no. They didn't care..."Oh, he's one of them garbage kids." "Well, I don't care if he is."

*Yes. [laughter] He's got a lot of money, yes!*

This is no lie! I'm telling you! Man, I've seen an awful change in the way of life.

I was telling somebody yesterday after that fire. Down here I had somebody that built a home down here. She had a bunch of us and wanted me to go there to have something to eat and everything else, and there was a young couple there from Sparks. They were much interested in talking to me as an old man, and I was telling them what a great change I have seen in my lifetime from the ways of life. From the horse...well, the animal.. as the method of work. The animal in place of a machine.

They told us that somebody was going to talk on the other side of Peavine and somebody on this side...no wires or nothing. See what a great change I've seen?

*Yes. You told me that while you were a fireman you bought the Donner Trail ranch, or you got some property up here in Verdi?*

Yes.

*Tell me that story. When and how did you do that?*

That was bank foreclosure. There's a lot of foreclosures—ranches and buildings and businesses and everything else—during the Depression, in the 1930s.

I was still in the fire department, and I said to my father-in-law, "Say," I said, "why don't you buy that ranch up there. You can get it for a song. My folks would move over on it, and they'll either buy it, or you could sell it to them. Or you could sell it to someone else."

He knew that those banks were going to close, because there was a Dr. Miniggio, a great Italian doctor living right in Reno, that knew. He was also the Italian consul representing Italy here. He notified some of the big, monied people in Reno that they'd better take their money out of the bank. I

think he told Mr. Devincenzi; I'm not sure. But I know that Mr. Devincenzi took a trip to San Francisco, and he sent a telegram to his wife that he needed that much money down there.

*Yes. Whatever money he had in the bank?*

It was some transaction he was doing down there; he had to have that money. So once she went and presented that to the bank, the bank said, "Gee, that's quite a large amount of money.

"Well," she said, "here's the telegram."

You see, what was going on?

*Yes, the bank was playing it kind of cagey.*

But that's how he got his money out of the bank.

*He used the telegram and they gave him his money, then?*

Oh, yes. They couldn't refuse it.

*Well, it sounds like maybe they wanted to refuse it, though.*

There was other people, too, that were notified, that never lost one penny in the banks.

*Different Italian people here, or others, too?*

Yes, sir, mostly were all Italian. There was Angelo Scanavino. He had a big hatchery here. Hatched chickens down there where the old brickyard used to be, now where Albertson's grocery store is on the end of Fifth Street. All in there was a brickyard down below there. Great big excavation there where they dug that and made brick. It was the right

kind of soil, kind of a clay. That's all been filled in there. Well, he had a chicken place there and also sold chicken feed and all that. And he had a hatchery there. Very brilliant man.

Who were the others? Salerno was a very wealthy man, and there was 2 of his sons graduated from the university here. One of them is still alive.

Anyway, all of those people were notified.

*They were Italians, too?*

Yes. They had shares in the Bank of Italy in San Francisco. That's how they made most of their money. There's a big, 2-storey home that their father built on the end of Dickerson Road, way up at this end. That was their mansion.

*OK. You were telling me the story, Joe, about how you got the ranch up here. You said that your father-in-law saved his money—he got the tip, and so he didn't lose his money; he got his money out. So then what happened?*

He went to the bank. See, they formed a realization company. I lost some money in them banks, too. It wasn't very much money; was a hell of a lot of money for me!

*Your money, yes! [laughter]*

It was my money. They gave me a big certificate, that realization company. I still got it someplace.

*You didn't realize very much! [laughter]*

So he got that ranch over there for \$5,000.

*How big a ranch was it?*

About 300 acres. All them buildings over there.

*Real good ranch, all those buildings and everything?*

Yes. And then the cemetery. [laughter] Then there was another couple of hundred acres above that came up, also. So he got that for \$5,000, too. So, he had about 1,000 acres for \$10,000.

*So what happened?*

In the 1940s my folks were getting old.

*Your folks moved over to the ranch?*

Yes, we moved there.

*Because they were renting the power company ranch, right?*

Yes. So they moved over there, and they were there a couple of years, I think.

*Did they give Devincenzi a rent on this new ranch?*

Yes. If they wanted to, they could've bought it. But he really bought it for my people. My mother and father, they were getting old; my mother was over 80 and my dad lived to be 90. He died right [in this house]...had a bed right here for him.

*Joe, you have told me before about how important it was to take care of your family. You were the oldest son and you moved them from here to Stockton, and then you moved from Stockton to different places. What made you feel you could leave your family up here in Verdi and go down to Reno and be a fireman? In other words, what made things different? Why didn't you take them to Reno with you, or why didn't you stay living up here?*

Well, when they sold the ranch, we bought a house in Reno.

*When you sold which ranch?*

When they moved off the Donner Trail, when Mr. Devincenzi sold the ranch.

Yes, OK.

We bought a house in Reno. And we bought this house over here, also, for my family.

*This next-door house?*

Yes. See, that house was up here at the old marble works. That was the office up there; that was transferred down. But, anyway, we bought a house in Reno up on Nevada Street for my mother and father. Do you know that my father wouldn't live there?

*Why not?*

"I don't want to live down here with somebody looking over the fence at you all the time." He took off and trekked up here, and we bought this for my youngest brother here, and he left Mama down there. He says, "I don't want to live down there with all that confusion." By golly, he wouldn't go back.

So then we had to sell the house. We sold it to a fellow in the cleaning business. His brother is still alive. And we bought that house up here, right across from this fire department now. That there belongs to one of my nieces—she's the judge now, the daughter of my youngest brother that used to be the judge here. So then the old man, he moved up here. After my mother passed away, then I bought this house here. This used to sit up on the right-of-way up there. I bought it for \$10.

*You moved it over here?*

Moved it over here.

*Do you remember what year you bought this house and moved it over?*

When did they build the highway? In the 1960s? A lot of things that happened here in the last few years, I forgot.

*More than the old stuff, isn't it?*

I remember things of 50, 60 years ago! I done so many things from one to the other to the other that....

*Yes, all runs together after a while.*

Yes. I want to take you over and show you a picture of me. I'm standing about that tall, holding my saddle horse, with a kid in the saddle and a kid standing alongside of me. They've got that picture hanging over there on that restaurant [Donner Trail Dinner House]. I was about 10 years old. I think they got it from Henry Hunken up here. He's got pictures of everything.. way, way back. Henry is about 88.

*Let's get back to your family and the ranch. You said your folks left the Donner Trail ranch when Mr. Devincenzi sold the ranch. Tell me about this.*

There was a rich divorcée came here; that's when Reno was the divorcee haven. Somebody got a hold of me...the Capurro boys down there. They said there was a rich woman and she'd like to buy the ranch and start a dude ranch—divorcees' haven, or something. So they sicced her onto me.

Before that, they rented the ranch headquarters of the Mayberry ranch to [a woman by the name of Ambrose or Bickel].

*This was the Capurros rented it?*

The Capurros did, through me. I was this [Ambrose or Bickel] woman's ranch foreman.

*While you were on the fire department still?*

No, that's before I was on the fire department, just before I joined the fire department. I wasn't married yet.

It was still Prohibition. I was managing for the Capurro boys, see. So here I am, the foreman, and I had to lasso her— she was running in the front yard. [I had to] show her how to lasso and catch her by both legs, and she had other girls taking pictures.

The first thing you know, she had a secret bar put in this big mansion. It was the mansion that Governor Sparks built; that used to be the Sparks ranch. [John Sparks purchased the ranch in 1893 and brought the first purebred Herefords to Nevada.] When I seen that—here I am going to get married, and here these gals coming out here. All they were thinking about is good, strong, husky young men. Them farmers boys is what they liked. When I seen that, I said, "Joe, you're going to get the hell out of here!" Jesus, it was right there before you! Whoo! I'm not lying about that!

So, I told her, "I'll get a foreman for you." So I did. I had to get the hell out of there! Those girls would go in that bar—you'd be surprised what they were doing. And here'd be 1, 2, 3 more would show up, and then in another week I had so-and-so and so-and-so... nice-looking women.

*Just full of women?*

Oh. And it was against the law to have that secret bar. Of course, it was in a private home. This is no place for me!

*You could see a lot of trouble! [laughter]*

So I got her a new foreman. And you know who I got to be her foreman?

*No. [laughter]*

My brother-in-law...married to my oldest sister.

*Oh, yes? [laughter]*

He had a couple of kids, and I thought he'd have brains enough to watch himself, but it ended up that he and my sister divorced.

*Over that deal?*

Yes. Well, anyway, then I came here, and this woman jumped me about this ranch over here. She's this Mrs. Rankin. She was here for a divorce, and she was a millionairess. She had a boyfriend here with her. He was from one of the islands down there; I don't know. Anyway, I said to my father-in-law, "Well, my folks can't buy the ranch; they want to retire." My 2 younger brothers.. Hank wanted to get married, and Jim also wanted to get married. They didn't want to live on the ranch. So he sold it, and he got \$40,000, which now it's worth \$40 million. That's what happened.

*Do you remember what year they sold that in?*

It was in the early 1940s.

*So they sold that 1,000 acre ranch here for \$40,000 then?*

Yes.

*Did she keep it? Does she still have it?*

No. She sold it. She had a boy and a girl. They stayed on the ranch, and she was going all the time...someplace. Then her daughter married one of the Quilici brothers up here; he owns a ranch up here. He's dead. They had a son, and the son is living up here. Robert Quilici. He graduated from the university up here a few years ago.

This would be her grandson is still living up there on the Quilici ranch, and he's a very smart kid. He works for the power company and also takes care of the ranch. They sold the Donner Trail ranch to Jack Fugitt; he was quite a promoter here. He lives down where Linkletter lives, down there where they play golf—Palm Springs. He was quite a playboy, this Jack Fugitt. I done a lot of work for him, too. Then it was also sold to some fellow here from Canada that had the divorcee haven over there.

*It was pretty famous for a while, for the divorcees, wasn't it?*

Oh, famous all over the world.

*Wasn't it Rockefeller's wife, BoBo, that came here?*

Yes. I had dinner with her over here. She was a very nice woman. She used to ride horseback every day. She had 2 sons and a daughter, or 2 daughters and a son? They were also here. She was a very brilliant woman.

Oh, this place here was known all over the world, everywhere. There were people here from *everywhere*! The annex that they built over there was 16 rooms, with just...well,

there was a bedroom and a toilet, all it was. They had to stay here for, what, 6 weeks then, wasn't it? I met people here from all over the world.

There was some men here, but mostly it was more women here than there was men. Boy, those women! They sure liked to rough it. They really enjoyed it. We used to have a camp right at the foot of the hill up there. We had a barbecue pit fixed there and everything else, and they'd stay there all night!

*Were you working for the ranch?*

I worked, sometimes. They'd call me for this and call me for that. I wasn't working steady for them.

*This was after you left the fire department?*

Well, see, I left the fire department in 1945. But even when I was in the fire department, they used to call me over [to] do this and do that and do other things.

Then it was sold to these people over here, Kronish. This man, Kronish, that bought that property and that owns it—that is, the estate owns it; he's dead—was a New York banker. His daughter [and son-in-law] Karen and Filberto Ferroni, they bought me 2 brand new tires for my Jeep the other day. He handed me a hundred dollar bill—donate to the fire department. Oh, yes. The other day, Ferroni called me over there; his father was a general for Mussolini.

*Oh, so he was Italian, too, then?*

He was Italian. She graduated from here, and then she went to Italy to some school over there that teach you nothing but foreign languages. She can speak 2, 3 languages— speaks good Italian. I guess

that's where she met the young man and married him.

*That's the one that's here right now?*

Yes. They got a beautiful home over there.

*And she has that restaurant?*

No, they got it leased. But the man that's running it now, Ramon Capitan, he used to own Eugene's restaurant. He's French.

*Yes, that's a good restaurant.*

So the other day, [Ferroni] wanted to pull some staples out of the ground, and he didn't know how to do it. Somebody drove some staples to protect a tree; they had a tree tied so the wind wouldn't bend it. They had it buried deep, these stakes, and he didn't know how to pull them out. So he called me.

Well, I says, "All you to do it give me a board. I got a bar, and I got a chain. I'll show you how to do things." I says, "Us poor old farmers' sons don't know much, but we know something."

*[laughter]*

So, all right. We put 2 half hitches around the spike, understand?

Yes.

Then you have the board over here, and you get the bar and run the bar through the chain here, see. Then you go like this on the bar...

*Oh, yes. Pulls it right out.*

See the power you got? He said, "Who the hell ever thought of that?"



I said, "Well, you learn that." I says, "I've done everything there was to be done on this earth. That's how I learned it. I learned it from my father."

Yes, so I went over there the other day and pulled them all out. Pretty near every Sunday or Saturday I got to go over there and have dinner with them.

*Oh, yes?*

Yes. I give him a lot of advice...this and that and the other thing; how to do this and how to do that.

Now he's going to turn the cemetery over to the community. Of course, he's going to come out on top, because he's already had it surveyed, and he'll deduct that from his income, naturally. You can't blame him for that.

*No.*

He's very brilliant...don't think that he isn't. He's highly educated. He has a business in Milano, Italy, and one in New York, also. He's a recognized photographer from the movie industry or something like that.

*So he goes back and forth to Italy all the time?*

Yes. Here a while back they were over there, and I had to go over and take care of the place for them.

*Does he have a house in Italy?*

His mother's still living; she was here for a while. She lives down in one of the most elite parts of Italy, facing the Adriatic Sea. They had a mansion down on Corsica, but they sold it.

*Corsica or Sardinia?*

Either Corsica or Sardinia, either one on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, isn't it?

*Yes, right.*

On the rocks, they said, built up...I guess a great mansion. Then they own, I think, something in Saint Moritz, right up over the border from where I was born, Switzerland. They also go over there in the wintertime because they have 2 little daughters, one that's about 12 and the other one about 10, I guess. Oh, no, he's after money; no worry about that. You see, in Italy, those Italians, they're not all damn fools. You can't take money out of Italy.

*No, it's pretty tough.*

And here we are. Why don't we get smart, too? They can take money and bring it over there, see?

*Let's get back to your job with the fire department. You stayed in that fire department for about 15 years?*

Fifteen and a half. I joined the fire department in October 1929.

*Right about the stock market crash, when the Depression started.*

Yes.

*You got in there just in time, because you'd have a check. If you'd have been on the farm or the ranch you wouldn't have done as well, I don't think.*

Well, it was in the fall of the year, and I had my brothers here; they were on the ranch here. So I said, "Well, what the heck. I might as well."



They came to ask me if I wanted to join the fire department; the chief sent somebody up here.. .fellow by the name of Tate. "Say," he said, "the chief would like to talk to you." Mr. [Lee] Hawcroft, one of the old, old-time men—I think he was a graduate of the university—was a highly respected individual. He was no politician, but he was 100 percent for the people.

His brother was the politician. His brother got killed answering an alarm on the corner of West and Fourth Street. He and a taxi cab came together and it killed him. He was the big shot with the big dahlia [badge] here, and he didn't know one end of a hose to the other.

This fellow [Hawcroft] was always the main operator, and he needed another man. After his brother got killed, they forced the job onto him. He wanted to rejuvenate the whole department, understand? Somebody'd tell him about a certain young man or so, and he'd go and investigate the family. Wouldn't say anything to the young man at all. He'd go see who his papa and mama were and their background, talk to them. If their background was OK, he'd pick his men.

*Try to make a deal?*

Once in a while he'd make a mistake, maybe. He sent somebody up here because I used to fight fires here. We had a lot of fires here on account of the sawmill here. We had a row after row of homes; they all burned down. We lost everything. People'd haul everything out here, and the fire'd start up there.

Well, they got nothing to fight the fire with. And the fire.. .that house would start on fire, and everybody'd move everything out there in the middle of the street. Then the other house would catch fire, and then everything would burn up! Even that stuff out

there. And they had no insurance. I've seen *bad* times! Yes, I have.. .when the people didn't have 10¢ in their pocket.

Well, anyway, when they got the first county engine, then they used to come up here. It was stationed in the Reno Fire Department. They'd drive up here and, man, I was right in there, helping them out. So they'd go back and, I guess, told the chief about me. So he told one, "Well, I'd like to see that young man."

So I went down there and talked to him in late October. Well, he wanted to know if I was married or this or that. "No," I said. "But I'm thinking about getting married." And he asked me who [was] my future wife, and I told him.

"Oh," he says, "I know that family." So he asked me if I'd join the fire department.

And I said, "Well, OK." I thought maybe I'd stay in there for the winter, anyway. Of course, I didn't tell him that.

*You were working on the ranch here?*

Yes. And then I'd do other work. I'd work for the power company, and in the wintertime they'd call me, when they had these power plants, to keep them operated all winter—where the water goes into the pipeline. They had what they called the forebay there, and they had grates there. If it freezes, then you have to have a rake and rake so it don't freeze up. And they used to pay you a dollar an hour! Oh, man! That was big money.

So I'd work for them and, well, I'd work anyplace, besides working on the ranch. So I went down there...\$120 a month. I lived right there. See, you could live right at central station.

*Oh, right at the firehouse?*

Yes. They had a kitchen there and everything. Of course, you was on duty 24 hours a day.

See, we worked the 2-platoon system as they called it. Day shift'd work 10 hours, and the night shift worked 14. But the night shift could sleep...be in bed. We had what they called quicks there—boots with the pants rolled down over them and our coat....

*All ready to go?*

And wham! If that bell ever hit, man... whoosh! We were dressed right now! I didn't have to pay no rent or anything else.

*And you lived there until you married in June 1930?*

[Yes.] Did I tell you that I took an International Correspondence Course, an ICC course, in school?

*No, you didn't tell me that.*

Well, I took a course in that.

*What kind of course? What did they teach you?*

It was supposed to be a high school course, to teach education.

*Well, what was in the course? What did they talk about in the course?*

I took spelling and writing and all of that.

*How old were you when you took that?*

I was in my twenties. That's before I was in the fire department in Reno.

*You took that by mail?*

Yes.

*Take the lessons, do the lessons, send it back to them?*

Yes. I didn't finish the whole thing. I got in the fire department; then I took that Los Angeles Fire College course.

*So you didn't want to continue the other one?*

I didn't finish it. I done pretty good, though.

*You told me once about teaching resuscitation. Tell me about how you got into that. How did that start?*

Well, I'll tell you how it started. Did I tell you about me taking the first aid course?

No.

Well, in the fire department, that's when the Red Cross started teaching the laymen first aid. I was in the fire department then. This was in the 1930s, and the Red Cross started teaching the laymen—mostly policemen and firemen and telephone people and power company people, things like that. They had their conference down on the Russian River at Guerneville, California. So the chief picks on me. He said, "I'll give you a vacation." And I never had a vacation in my life before.

I said, "You give me the vacation with pay?"

"Oh," he says, "sure, yes."

So they sent me down there to Guerneville for 2 weeks, taking these instructions under the Red Cross—I think they were all old army doctors, retired. When I came back, then we started teaching all of the firemen.

*You went down there alone? Or did you go with somebody else?*

No, my wife was with me.

*How long were you down there?*

Two weeks. Then we instructed everybody in the fire department—first aid. They got me teaching the White Hats... the Nevada White Hats—big organization in Reno.

*Is that like a cowboy group or something?*

Yes. All the big shots in Reno belonged to it, mostly. [There was a second group.] Mrs. Clara Beatty and 48, I think, of the leading women in the community. She was a very noted woman.

Yes.

What is that girls' group?

*Campfire Girls?*

Campfire Girls. I instructed them. I instructed the CCC boys at the camp they had here. I instructed the ski patrol; they used to come down here. I instructed practically everybody in Gerlach and Empire.

*Why did you go up there?*

Once a week, in January and February. We drank a quart of whiskey up and back to keep from freezing! The Red Cross said.

*Oh, the Red Cross used to send you around?*

We went up there, and the Red Cross handled it. I used to take my wife with me most of the time, and then I had another fellow that was a fireman; he was a Verdi boy—Emmett Murphy.

*Did they used to pay you for doing it?*

No. This was all done free of charge. I got paid from nobody.

*Did they give you the gas money?*

Yes. We got the gas from the Red Cross. Then I instructed people in Sierraville—U.S. Forest Service people and people from the community. People in Wadsworth. During the war, up at the university, the aviation outfit. Dr. Lawrence had to sit alongside of me. He couldn't teach because he didn't have the Red Cross certificate! Anyway, I instructed everybody. They'd call me here. And Doris Duke Cromwell, she wanted a private instructor; she was here for a divorce.

*Here in Verdi?*

In Reno. She had a house rented up in back of the golf course, her and her secretary, Marian Pascell.

When I came back from this schooling, why, my mother asked me what I had learned. My mother used to help women in the Italian Alps in Italy, people giving birth. She wasn't doing it professionally, money or anything; she was just...the next door neighbor or Mrs. So-and-so. She even done it here. They used to come after her here, in this country. Years ago, the women didn't go to the hospital to have a child; they had him at their home...oh, some of them in a maternity home. There was 3 or 4 maternity homes in Reno.

Anyway, she wanted to know what I had learned, especially in.... I told her this and that—fractures and splints here, and heatstroke and sunstroke and.. .well, everything. Artificial respiration, the prone pressure method, the Sylvester method and the Swedish method.

"Well," she said, "how about the newborn?"

“Oh,” I says, “well, the newborn. It was first to tie the umbilical cord. If you didn’t have nothing to tie it with, you’d put a figure 8 in it. Cut it off about 12 to 14 inches, and then make a figure 8 in it. Then clean the mucus from their mouth and tap them between the shoulders. Sometimes they’re born with the umbilical cord wrapped around their neck. In other words, it’s affecting their breathing. Then tap them between the shoulders, make them [breathe]. If not, get them by their feet and hold their head down there and spank the bottom of their feet.”

“Well, didn’t they say anything about breathing into their mouth?”

I said, “No!” And when she said that, oh, man! Because you’re breathing in oxygen!

She said, “Do you know that it’s born in the mother? It’s born in the female, especially if she finds her young not breathing. She’ll pick him up—the instinct to pick him up and breathe in his mouth.”

So I got to studying that and studying it, and I wrote here and wrote there—I don’t know; I even forgot where—and never got no answers that amounted to anything. So I made quite a study of it myself, and there was another kid by the name of Rudolph Schaibley in the fire department—very brilliant. We got to studying it, but me mostly.

When you breathe in, you breathe in oxygen. You breathe in a mouthful—that’s about a pint, let’s say—and it’s not all used, see. When you’re breathing in oxygen and also used-up oxygen—carbon dioxide, which is a stimulant, see—you’re breathing in a food and a stimulant. So I got to thinking very much about that.

I’d roll up a rag or a towel or a coat, something. I couldn’t teach it because I didn’t have it in the manual! But I would demonstrate it—[makes sound of breathing in and out] like that, about 5 times. [Breathes]

Then I’d rest a little while. Then [breathes] 5 times, see. I got laughed at; I got criticized, and, “Where did you get that idea?”

I told them, “I got it from my mother.” I says, “My mother told me that it’s born in the female, and my mother was the mother of 8 children. She should know something about it.”

So anyway, Doris Duke Cromwell, she even gave me the money to buy a deer-hunting license. I, naturally, killed a buck, and I brought the venison up there. [She had a] Chinese cook—a man. And we had venison—her and her secretary and myself and Don Questa. He was county treasurer or something. [Mr. Questa was Washoe County recorder in the 1960s and 1970s.] He’s retired now. And I was explaining it to her, so she had this doll made for me. Did you ever see it?

*You showed it to me, yes.*

I used to use that to demonstrate. But I got laughed at and everything else and criticized. “Where the heck did you get that idea?” Especially in Mrs. Clara Beatty’s...at the high school in the evenings. These 2 girls were from the university. I don’t know what they were doing up there—they’re professors or what. But, “Where did you get that idea, Captain?” They used to call me “Captain” because I was a captain.

All of a sudden here it is all over everywhere.

*That mouth-to-mouth resuscitation?*

Yes.

*And not just for babies either?*

For everybody.

*Drowning and fire and smoke inhalation and all that.*

After we got instructed in the fire department, we even put on demonstrations over at the State Building. We even brought over this girl that I saved. They have a picture of her in the fire department in Reno.

*You saved a girl with that method?*

At Mrs. Gibeau's\* maternity home on Sutro Street. The first call that we got in the fire department, we demonstrated that we were ready to give first aid. I happened to be on duty. So in comes this call from Mrs. Gibeau's maternity home in the 400 block on Sutro Street. The chief turned around to me, and he says, "Well, there you are!" They wouldn't go.

So I took another fireman with me and the chief's coupe—we didn't have no rescue rig or anything—and away we went. We went down there, and there was 2 doctors there—Dr. Paradis and Dr. McPhearson from Sparks, and they said, "Where do you want her?" Here they had her right here on the kitchen table.

Of course, we had oxygen; we had an inhalator. They hadn't invented the resuscitator, yet. But they had an inhalator. You turn the valve on, and then we had this bottle of oxygen. It was called carbogen—95 percent oxygen and 5 percent carbon dioxide. So in 10 minutes [makes sound of baby crying]. Boy, you ought to've seen those doctors come in there! They were out there having a smoke. She's alive today; she has to be over 40 years old. It happened in the 1930s.

*She still lives in Reno?*

No. These people, the Engels, over at the hotel here, are relatives to her. And they have

a picture of her, a little girl, in the Reno Fire Department. You ask Van Meter, and he'll show it to you, if you're down there.

After that, when we used to speak over at the State Building, we'd demonstrate how to rescue with a ladder—pack a victim down to the ladder—and first aid and all that. We had her right on the stage there, showing what first aid done.

So now it's all over. Now the Division of Forestry men up here at this station, they answer all first aid calls and medical alerts. They get a lot of them, especially at Boomtown. People come from a low altitude to a high altitude, a sudden change. See, nature gave us these here to travel with, our legs. We would get acclimated from sea level—14.7 pounds per square inch atmospheric pressure—to up here where it's about 12½, see. It's easier to breathe down there than it is up here. How long would it take us to walk from San Francisco up to 7,000?

*It would take awhile.*

Quite a while. We'd get acclimated to it. But no, we do it in an hour and a half? A lot of people.. it's a shock to them. So they get a lot of calls up there. [There's] an Indian boy up there; he just came back after training in Los Angeles. Man, is he good!

They worked on a man that had a heart attack up here chopping wood, and we got a big donation to my department here of \$600. So now we're going to buy a lot of equipment that they use in medical aid—it's going to cost around \$1,000, so we got to put up about \$400 more, see—and turn it over to them. The only time they call us—if they need help. Then we answer the alarm. "So-and-so and so-and-so...40-22, 40-55, Verdi Volunteers!" Then boom! We have to go, too. But that's the story.



OK.

And I got laughed at; I got criticized—"Where did you get that idea?" And I learned it from my mother, and then I studied it.

*Joe, how long did you teach the different first aid methods? You told me about the different places where you taught, but when did you first start that and for how long did you do it?*

Well, I started in the 1930s, and I quit in the 1940s.

*You were a captain by the time you started doing this teaching?*

Oh, yes. They made a captain out of me right away. I got pictures up at the firehouse. I instructed, also, the Sparks Fire Department. I got a picture of that. I instructed in Wadsworth, Sierraville, Loyalton, everywhere.

*Like when you instructed up in Sierraville, where did you instruct? Who did you instruct with?*

It was at a fire station there, and it was some of the townspeople and some of the firemen and some [people from] the headquarters of the Toiyabe National Forest. They had me going all the time. It was practically everybody.

Then I was chairman of the highway first aid stations. I was appointed to that by the Red Cross. There was a first aid station at Farad, on the highway [Interstate 80]. There was a first aid station in Sparks. We had the sign right out on the main street; that was the main highway [U.S. 40]. Then there was a first aid [station] at Bowers Mansion; then there was a first aid [station] in Wadsworth. On the highway there was a sign. In case anybody got

hurt anyplace, those people were trained in first aid. And I was in charge of those.

*What did you have to do about that?*

I went to see that they had all the right equipment, and I used to go talk to them, make out the right reports....

*Were these people employed, or were they just volunteers?*

All volunteers.

*Were they just families who lived along the road?*

Well, there were people stationed...like up at Farad, there was the operator there. See, they used to live there at the power plant, and he was in charge of the operation. He and the people that was there were trained in first aid. In the Wadsworth, they were trained. The man in the grocery store there, he was trained.

When I was in the fire department in Reno—I think I told you about this—I drove to Gerlach January, February...I forget what year. Once a week in the dead of winter, training those people up there in first aid. The people from Empire would come to Gerlach. I drove up there in all that weather that's below freezing and everything. Then I instructed people in Wadsworth, people in Loyalton, people in Sierraville. Instructed the air cadets at the university and during the war. They had me going all the time. And I instructed some ski patrolmen from up at the summit, up in Truckee and up on the mountain up there. They had me doing everything.

*You used to have a kind of routine, a way you used to lecture? Didn't you have a kind of a skeleton that you put together?*

Yes, I had the picture of a skeleton; I still got it someplace. I'd have a pile of bones down here, see.

*Human bones?*

No. I'd say that I had bones down there. "See these bones here?" I was going to build the human machine, just like building a house. That's what I used. Common...didn't use no big names or anything else. I don't even know where the medical profession got all them fancy names. Do you?

All right. There was some professor from the university over at the State Building that attended my class, too. Yes, I spoke before them.

I'd take bone for bone...I'd build the structure first. Then I'd say, "I don't nail them together." I said, "We put strong, fibrous bands to hold those bones together."

*So those were your props?*

Then I put in the pump system. That's the heart and the arteries and the veins. I used to explain what the heart done, how it worked, the pressure through the arteries, see, vented into...we call them capillaries... little, fine arteries— all through the system. That's where the food was in. That was by pressure and muscular action, also. Then it went into veins, and every so far, veins have got a valve in it that by muscular action they squeeze that vein. There's very little pressure in the vein, hardly any at all—only by muscular action. And there's a valve there, see, that when you squeeze it, the valve opens, and blood [goes] in it, and blood can never come back. That goes into your heart. I used to explain the heart had 2 valves and 2 pumps. And I used to explain that by itself.

Then I'd put in the electrical part—the dynamo up here.

*The brain.*

And then the main cable down the back—explain all of that. This was the dynamo up here; this one's the generator up here. Then I'd put in all of the furniture. I knew the name of every spleen, the pancreas gland and this and that— all of it—the stomach and the small intestines and how many feet of small intestine. Then the large intestines and the bladder and then the diaphragm here. And divided in the lower part and the upper part. Then the breathing part here—the lungs. All of it, the whole thing.

Then I put on the muscles. And then I'd put the fatty layer, even in between some of the muscles. The fat covered *all* the whole machine; that's mostly to protect us from cold, and also you could go without food for quite a while because of that fat was food for us.

Then we put the covering on it—everywhere—the skin. A little break in that skin is danger of infection. Then, that's all together, and I crank it up, and I said, "That's the human machine." I used to be good at it.

And I used to explain breathing. This was the diaphragm here...that gives an idea of what happened.

This is a rattlesnake that I caught up on Dog Valley Grade. [Mr. Mosconi shows Dr. Douglass a preserved rattlesnake.] He was crossing the road right at Moe's Station up there, about halfway up. There was 3 or 4 of us in my Jeep going up there, and here was this snake coming across. "Oh!" I says, "That's just what I want!" He had a big chipmunk in him; he had a big hump in him. I took him down, and [Curt Kybert], who was deputy sheriff for a long time—he was an undertaker—he embalmed it for me.



*So you used this in your talks, too?*

Yes. How to treat rattlesnake bites. Had to do all of that. I even had a black widow spider in a jar.

*You mean a live one?*

Yes. And she gave birth in that jar. It had a little hole so she could get the air. And all of a sudden there was like a web, and all of a sudden here hatched out a whole bunch of young little spiders. I never counted them, but there must have been 10 or more little spiders. I left it down in the firehouse, and I used to put a fly in it. You ought to've seen that mother spider.. .rrr! ..grabbed that fly and inject something in her, then wind her up on the web. If I didn't put enough [flies] in, those spiders ate one another. I just wanted to see what would happen. Didn't keep [her] because I wanted to get rid of her, anyway.

I caught a young male spider, and I put him in there, and she killed him! Did you ever read the story about the black widow spider?

*Yes, right.*

The male, as soon as he breeds her, had better get the hell out of the way!

*Yes. She kills him.*

Yes, it's an experience. And this here [a doll] was made by Mrs. Doris Duke Cromwell, and it's all falling to pieces.

*That was what she had made for you to demonstrate resuscitation, right?*

Yes. You can ask her; you can write a letter to her wherever she's at—I think you can find out where she's at—and she'll back me up that

that's what I was teaching. And boy, did I get laughed at. See, I quit the fire department because jealousy, envy.

*Really?*

That chief didn't want to let me go up there to teach the air cadets because he thought I was getting too much publicity I guess. That Dr. Lawrence made it that he went to see the mayor, and the mayor says, "We are at war with...." He's going to go up there.

I put in 15½ years, and then it got too much politics. We got criticized because there was too many Italians in the department.

*Really?*

Yes. See how backward we were in certain things in this country?

*Well, who was criticizing you? Or who was criticizing the department for that?*

Well, the chief that was appointed after the old-timer retired, see, he was forced on that job. He couldn't even spell "cat." That's how educated he was. He was a chauffeur for one of the Roberts—Mayor [Edwin E.] Roberts. He was a chauffeur back in Washington when Roberts was a congressman. Then when [Roberts] came back he got to be mayor down here. He said, "I'll put a barrel of whiskey on every corner and hang a dipper on it!" And they elected him mayor! I remember. And he was his chauffeur.

*He made his chauffeur the fire chief?*  
*[laughter]*

From a chauffeur he appointed him as fire chief.

*He didn't like the Italians, or he didn't want so many Italians in the department?*

Too many Italians. There was too much power. There was [J. Everett] Ede and Swede Peterson. He was quite a ball player. He was known all over the country here as a great pitcher. But the majority of them had an Italian name. Most of them were born in Reno.

*They just had Italian names?*

Just had an Italian name. Head of the school, Billingshurst, used to walk by, and he'd go in and talk to the chief—the old chief, the one that hired me. Not the one that got killed; it was the other one, before they appointed this one here.

*What's his name, the new chief?*

Twaddle. They had a livery stable here.

*Did you know a Teske?*

Yes! I was his captain. He's dead, isn't he?

*I imagine. I lived across the street from Teske, and he was in the fire department. I never knew just what he did, but he took me fishing a couple of times when I was a boy, there along the Truckee River.*

Yes. I was his captain. From the service he came in the fire department. A little, short fellow.

Yes.

Anyway, Billingshurst used to walk by there, when the station was down on West Street, and he'd say, "Lee, I hear quite a bit of

criticism; you've got a lot of Italians on the department here."

Well, Lee said, "The hell with the name. Listen," he says. "The Americans are out there boo this and boo that and boo this and boo that. Boy, they got more this and more that; they can do this, and they can do that. But when that bell rings," he says, "that's when the Italians come to the front. And that's what I want."

*That was the old chief?*

That was the old chief. He said, "That's what I want is *fire fighters*! That's what I'm here for; that's what we're here for!" And he made that statement to Mr. Billingshurst. If Billingshurst was alive today, he'd tell that that's just what he said to him.

Not because some Italian or anything else, but he used to go and pick the old families' sons—this one here and that one there. Sure, he got [J. Everett] Ede...and he was a hell of a man. Oh, man, he was an old family—the Edes. Peterson...he was from Sparks. He was afraid of nothing!

When [the chief] took over, he had quite a few guys in there that were alcoholics, see, that he didn't want them. Before he was chief he'd seen a lot of things that went on that he didn't like. He got rid of them just as fast as he could.

That's when we all got together and formed an organization that we, at the first day of the year, gave notice to the council and the mayor that in April we would resign.

*The Italian boys.*

There were some of them that weren't Italians...took the whole bunch. Out of 41 men there was over 30 of us that resigned at one time. Most of the Italians went out. I don't think there was one Italian stayed there.

*You mean because of the new chief?*

Yes.

*But not just because he was against Italians?*

No. Not because he was against Italians; just because he didn't know nothing.

*He was a political appointee, yes?*

Yes. We wanted to get rid of him, and he'd done things here that....

*Well, did you get fired, or did they fire the chief?*

No. We resigned.

*That was that? Or did they make the chief leave, too?*

No. He stayed. He died right after that, yes.

*And those of you that quit, that was it?*

If they would've changed the chief, we'd stay. And we gave them enough notice; we gave them January, February, March, April—that many months—to prepare themselves that we were going to leave. We even had representatives from the National Board of Fire Fighters up here to try to see if they couldn't straighten it out because that was a hell of a shock... all of us men quitting.

*Sure.*

Most of us experienced men. [Leroy] Lobdell...he quit, too. But that's what started it, the discrimination against the Italians.

*How did they discriminate? What would the new chief do?*

I took that Los Angeles Fire College course, and I was one of the first first aid instructors in the county. I went out on the first first aid call, and they had me talking to the schools.

Well, he was jealous of me because I was out in the front, understand?

I was only doing it because I didn't want the chief's job. I told him. The grand jury even had us over there to question us, and I said, "No, I don't want the chief's job."

But he's jealous of me, see? Now, when the university demanded that they instruct the air cadets...see, the air cadets took over the university up there that you're at.

Yes.

They wanted the air cadets instructed in medical aid. That's what the government called it—not first aid. So the professors up there were not qualified; they didn't have their certificate.

*Right.*

Dr. Lawrence! He was a doctor! He wasn't qualified to teach medical aid. So they came after me. They went down and talked to the chief, and the chief says, "No, no." See how jealous he was? He says, "He's too important a man—he's a captain—and he's too important a man. I can't let him go up there." And we were at war!

*What years were you in the fire department, Joe? When did you go in and what year did you quit?*

I went in in 1929 and quit in 1945.

*Where'd you go after that?*

Oh, I worked for the power company. I lived in Reno. Went to work for the Union Ice Company.

*Do you remember about how long you worked for Union Ice Company?*

I didn't work very long. They couldn't find nobody so they begged me to. I wasn't working. Nye Sbragia from Sparks was in charge of the Union Ice Company, and he came and he said, "Joe," he said, "why don't you come and give us a hand? We just can't find anybody to do the work." So, me and another rancher's son....

*Do you remember his name?*

Hmm...boy, I'm getting terrible about names. I also worked for the Crystal Ice Company. I done everything. I worked for different people here and there and everywhere. But I worked for the power company for quite a while, repairing these flumes and cleaning these ditches.

*This is after you left the fire department?*

After I left the fire department, yes.

*You were working as a manual laborer or were you a foreman or something like that?*

No, it was manual labor.

I also had a crew of men for Harker and Harker to put a power line over the highest altitude in these mountains. I had a crew of men cutting the swath, cutting all the timber and everything, for certain widths, to put the power line through from Gardnerville. What's that valley out there?

*You mean Carson Valley?*

Yes, Carson Valley. What's the name of that little town over there this side of Markleeville?

*Oh, I think I know the one you mean. It's sort of like an Indian reservation in there—Woodfords.*

This side of Woodfords, yet.

*Genoa?*

No, the other side of Genoa. Funny name. Hunkville? Just the other side. From there we started right up over the mountain, and we came out up back of Meyers [California]. That was the highest altitude power line.

I had a crew of men that used to drive from Reno out there. I used to leave here about 4:00, 5:00. Some of them stayed in Reno...drove out from Reno. Where the hell the others stay? They lived someplace; I forget.

One of the young men said hello to me down here this last summer—and he's an attorney in Reno now. I gave him hell; he didn't want to work. He was a schoolboy yet. Gosh darn! One of the big official's sons...for the power company.

*When was this, that you put up that power line? And how did you get that job?*

Harker and Harker wanted me to go work for them all the time. I was their foreman for that job. I took care of the whole crew. Some of them lived up there. They were Basques from Floriston or Truckee, most of them that were doing the cutting. Also, there was 2 brothers from Oklahoma that were here. Then I had a couple of them that were the main fallers. They were really timber fallers...used to fall for these loggers. We done that in the wintertime, see, because that's the only time we could find those kind of people.

*When you lived in Reno, Joe, did you used to have a vegetable garden there at your house?*

Yes.

*Did you have chickens and stuff, too?*

Yes.

*What else did you have right there, because you were right in town, weren't you?*

Well, at one time I raised pheasants.

*Right inside town?*

Yes. I even sold some pheasants to the fish and game. You see, I worked on the pheasant farm up here for a while.

*Oh, you didn't tell me that. Where was that pheasant farm?*

It's just across...you know where Trelease Lane is at? Well, it's the base of that mountain over there. It was all in California. The state owned all that acreage in there; that was the Nevada State Game Farm. All in California.

*[laughter]*

That's where they raised chukar partridges and pheasants. We raised several hundred pheasants. Also, they used to have a man by the name of Angelo Scanavino that had a hatchery down there about where that grocery store [is] this end of Fifth Street, there by Keystone—Albertsons. All that area in there— Angelo Scanavino had a hatchery there.

*But for chickens.*

Yes, chickens. But he also hatched pheasants for the fish and game. Then they'd take the pheasants up there, and I was the

caretaker when they brought the pheasants over. They hired me as the caretaker.

*How old were you then? Was that before or after the fire department?*

I think that was after the fire department. Oh, I got in quite a mess there. You see, I was there where you had to keep a certain temperature and certain feed, and all that. The man that they had—Hap Early—that the state hired, he didn't know one pheasant from another. Politics. He was the foreman, supposed to be. He was hired from Los Angeles someplace. So, I'd leave there kind of late at night, and I'd get up early in the morning, and here I'd find a couple of bucketfuls of dead birds—little bitty birds. I couldn't figure what was the matter. I said, "Is it the food, or is...they're getting a *draft*! Because a draft'd kill the young bird. Killed most anything. A horse, you built....

*You build the shed for him....*

You got to build it so there's no draft, because if there's a draft, that cow or that horse will never go in there.

*Won't even go in?*

Did you know that?

*No, I didn't know that.*

No, sir. Canepas—Louis and his brother, Bill, who's still alive—they owned this ranch down here where all them trailers are. The Canepa ranch they call it now. Bill, his wife lives down there at Mogul. They own a little ranch there, and he owns also a big ranch out at Wellington. And here's a *great big*, long shed that they built for those cows for

the wintertime, and those cows'd never go in there.

Well, anyway, I sneaks up early one morning. "Oh," I says, "oh, I see why these birds are dying." The windows were open...a draft. You know what I told him?

No.

Boss or no boss, I don't care. I'm a taxpayer. Did he ever get told off? Yes. If he'd a got tough, I could have got tough, too. See, I really got tough. He never touched those windows no more, and we never lost no more birds. See what he was doing?

*He'd just come and open the windows?*

Do you know why he done that? I'll tell you why he done that. Because, before, they used to raise only so many birds, and the birds cost them \$7 apiece to raise. So here he's got a couple of old rancher boys up there—one of them is Eddie Sin; he's a high police officer or deputy sheriff or sheriff up in Tonopah or up in that country someplace. He was a rancher's boy from Eureka. He would take care of the birds when they got so old, then he'd take....

*Then he'd take them over, yes?*

Yes, until they got big enough so we could turn them out in the pens outside. He didn't want those birds. In other words, we were saving [money]. Those birds, instead of \$7 apiece, they were only costing maybe \$2 apiece. And it would show him up. Show them up; the whole outfit. Understand, they made a mistake when they hired 2 rancher boys, because they know how to arrange things. They had to. They learned from their papa and mama.

*How long were you in the pheasant business up there?*

I wasn't there very long. Too much politics for me. Again, I got out of there. I did. He hired me because he didn't have anybody that knew how to take care of those young birds.

Yes.

Then also chukar.

*You were raising chukars, too?*

We were raising chukars, too. Boy, did he get told.

You see, I'm not bragging or anything, but I never was afraid of my job no place, nowhere. Whenever I was put on the job, I was put on the job as if that was my own. And I was afraid of nobody. Like the Reno Fire Department, I was afraid of nobody. No. I didn't care to stay there. That's the way I felt. I told him off.

I even helped bury him up here. They cremated him; I buried him up here.

*Did you have any other jobs after this, after you quit the fire department?*

Did I tell you about operating the sawmill at Hirschdale?

No.

Yes, a little circular mill there at Hirschdale.

*When was that?*

Oh, that was in the 1940s.

*That was' after you left the fire department?*



Yes.

*Tell me about that deal. How'd you get into that?*

A fellow by the name of Metzker bought that sawmill at Hobart Mills, out of Truckee. My brother was a sawyer; that's the main man in the sawmill—runs the carriage. Then there was a fellow by the name of Cecil Terwilliger that used to be county commissioner in Reno here. He came here from Tonopah. He was a timekeeper in Tonopah for a Mr. Revert that owned the sawmill in Verdi. He moved here and got to be the general manager here. Then from here he moved to Reno, and he got elected as a county commissioner. Ended up having a lumberyard—retail yard—in Reno, and he was a friend of Metzker's. There's a Metzker family in Reno, now. Mr. Metzker is retired.

They had financial trouble, the little circular mill there at Hirschdale, and it was closed down. So they got me to reopen the sawmill. I hired all the men and everything, and they would haul the logs there, and then the lumber would go to Mr. Terwilliger.

*Do you remember any of the men you hired there?*

Oh, about 15, I'd say, at the most.

*Do you remember any of their names?*

One of them is a retired army lieutenant, Frank McCree. He married a woman from here, one of the Hill family—Dora Hill—and she was a widow. They moved back to Missouri or someplace or Virginia. I understand she's still alive.

*But your brother was involved, too? He was a sawyer up there at Hirschdale?*

No. He was a sawyer for the mill at Hobart Mills. But this Terwilliger and Metzker were good friends, so they got me to operate the sawmill.

*You were the superintendent or the foreman?*

Well, I was the overseer. I was in full charge of the whole thing.

*How long did you do that?*

Oh, not too long. Just one summer. I don't think it went all summer, because they used to buy the logs from the Homewood brothers, the sheep people. There's a big development up there now, up toward Juniper Creek—Glenshire—lot of homes. They owned all that country...sheep people from Folsom, I think. They were selling the timber. I went to work for Metzker in 1949 when they started this. They wanted to move the mill to Verdi. He wanted to use the old sawmill site, the old Verdi Lumber Company sawmill. He had a little trouble with the highway. This was the main highway; it was 40.

I tried to get him to move to Verdi because that would stimulate the town. And he's sure sorry he didn't...buy the town of Verdi.

*Yes, I'll bet! [laughter]*

Could've had it for a song, then. So he moved down and bought part of the Capurro ranch, just the other side of the River Inn. He hired me—naturally, I was an experienced millman—and my brother to help build the sawmill. Well, I started it for him in 1949, and we opened the mill in July of 1951.



*So 2 years building it.*

It was July of 1951, I think, when we run the first boards through.

*So you and your brother were down there working on that?*

Yes. Then I ended up being the scaler, the man that measures every log that comes in there and signs the tickets.

*Which brother was it that you were working with down there?*

George, next to me. I was hated by all the loggers because I was cheating them on the logs.

*Cheating them on the logs? [laughter]*

Well, that's what they think. In other words, I was the one that bought the material to manufacture the lumber.

*Right. How long did you stay at that job?*

Three or 4 years or so, 5. Then he sold it to a fellow by the name of Spangler from up in Oregon—a big businessman, lumberman, from up in there. Very brilliant man. And I was for him [doing the] same job. I was there for 2 years. After that, why, I quit. I wanted to retire, and then Metzker moved. After he sold that operation there, he went over and bought the mill at Loyalton—Sierra County.

He called it the Feather River Lumber Company. And he bought a mill in Sierraville, belonged to an Indian that was originally here from Verdi. Oh, what was his name? He also had a mill at the other side of Bordertown before you get to Chilcoot [California]. That do they call that?

*Hallelujah Junction?*

Hallelujah. He had a sawmill there. He owned the mill also at Sloat, down the other side of Portola [California]. And then he also may have had an interest in that mill at Quincy.

So he hired me to be the overseer. I was in charge of all of the logging operations.

*For the whole operation?*

Yes. I was going from here to there to there to there.

*When was this?*

Well, it had to be in the 1960s. I'd travel from place to place to place. I'd stay sometimes at Sloat, sometimes I'd stay at Loyalton in the office; they had rooms upstairs. And I had keys to every place. I was one of the most trusted employees. Well, it was like it belonged to me. You had to cut that log right, because we paid for that log. But we wanted to get most out of that log that we could get. And timber fallers you know.. .oh, he's nothing but a lumberjack. You got to know what you're doing. You're falling them great big trees, and you got to tall them so you don't break them. If you break them, you ruin them.

We used to cut them in 16-foot, 6-inch lengths. That's what the lumber is, mostly—16-foot-6—the 6 inches for the trim. After it dries, the ends [are] checked on it. Then to handle them, we'd cut them 33 feet long so they were easier to handle to load them on the logging trucks. Say you get 2 [that are] 33-foot and then down to about 8-inch top. If you could make a 16, we got a 16-6. The more of those that we could get, why, the better, because, like, 12-foot lumber was not much called for—b-foot and 12-foot, things

like that...14 foot. Of course, they also sawed lumber into a 24-foot. But in the early days they didn't. Everything was 16s. . .16-6. You had to be careful with the machinery that they had that you didn't gouge the logs with the loaders and things like that. And you had to cut the limbs flush with the body of the tree; couldn't leave them stick out there.

*So there's a lot of precision?*

And be careful not to skin too much bark off of them.

*So you were up, actually, where they were cutting the logs? You were up looking at the actual logging operations as well as being at the sawmills?*

I'd go from one place to the other place to the other place. Then I'd go up to the sawmill, and I'd stand there and watch—"There comes that guy, again!"

The *base*, the buck log as we call it, is the base at the first log. That's where most of the clear lumber comes from. The knots have dissolved, and it's clear. There's no knots in the board. So you had to be sure that the sawyer, when he first started, he got the first 6 inches, maybe, of good wood to take the bark off, about 6 inches. There, you'd see that nice clear board.

Then he called for, say, one inch. The setter that's sitting up on the carriage, he set one inch. Then, they'd take that one inch. When they'd take that one inch off it, they'd have a face, maybe, of 12 inches. Then he'd go inch and a half. Well, inch and a half of clear lumber is the most valued lumber because that's where you make all the molding...sash and all that...years ago, before they made metal frames and all that.

You got to be an expert at that. The sawyer's got to know, if he cuts in another inch

and a half, he might cut into the heart, or it's rough—knots and everything. Then turn it over, and you do the same thing on that side.

I used to sit there and stand there and watch them. I could tell what kind of board comes out at the other end. Then I'd go down there and watch the lumber grader. This *long* table; there's 1, 2, 3, chains, and the lumber'd come out there...clunk, clunk, clunk...and the long chain, with a series of trucks here and a series of trucks here...on the railroad. And a certain numbered board would go on each one of those trucks. This would be a 1-by-12, see; this would be a 1-by-6, this one here would be a 2-by-4 or this one over here would be a 6-quarter-12, and all that. And the grader up there—he's walking on these boards. He had a stick with a chalk on the end of it; then he had another one here with a hook—it's a ruler with a handle on it. Very flexible. He'd look at this side of that board, then he'd... whrrrp! ..he'd turn it over. Then he'd look at that; then he'd mark it.

*He graded it?*

Had to watch him to see that he was marking those boards right. I'd go through the whole operation...every one of the sawmills.

*You don't think they liked you that much, those fellows?*

Nobody liked me.

*They didn't like to see you coming?*

No! We had the scalers that scale the log. I used to sit there and watch them. Sometimes, they'd scale, and here'd come the truck to be unloaded; they'd scale them over here, and I'd be over there before they unloaded, and I'd have my stick and I'd measure that load,

and then I said, "Let me see your ticket." They didn't like that.

*You were kind of the policeman of the outfit?*

Well, in other words, I was the most hated guy in the whole operation.

*Yes, right. You were the cop! [laughter]*

I was seeing that the company didn't get cheated. If you ask Mr. Metzker who I am, right today.. .oh!

*He's still alive?*

Oh, yes. Very influential man in Reno. He was the head of the standard Oil Company in Fallon area. And he married a Wadsworth girl, one of the Crosbys—one of the old-timers down there, the old Crosby family. They're both alive. They did own a lot of property here. They have 3 boys here that are in the real estate business. In fact, he has 4 boys and 2 girls.

*How long did you stay working with him, doing this kind of overseer job?*

Oh, I don't know. I used to work for him just in the summertime.

*Oh, you didn't work in the winter?*

No. I didn't.

*Of course, the mills were shut down.*

Mills were shut down most of the time in the wintertime. That's where I made my mistake. And I didn't think about it. Only work half a season—that didn't work up good on my social security.

See, I had big wages before. That is, it was big money then. Now, it wouldn't be worth nothing. But I think I lost about half my income for social security.

*Because you only worked half a year?*

Because I only worked half a year for so many years.

*You didn't look out for your pensions very carefully, because when you were with the fire department you quit before you had your pension, right?*

I didn't get no pension on the fire department.

*So you spent a lot of years there and didn't get a pension, and then you're out with the social security. So you didn't look out very carefully for yourself on that.*

Nope. I didn't. Well, in fact, it didn't bother me at all. I wasn't out to just get big pensions or anything. I didn't care. They told me that I could get my money. I'd put in my 6 percent that we'd put in there, so I said, "Oh, I'll come up some day and get it." So I went up there one day and got the money...oh, about a year after I quit, I guess.

I never got fired off of no job. No time. I'm not bragging, but whenever I was hired, I worked as if it belonged to me. I worked for the interest of the people that hired me because that's why they hired me, as I should work for their interest. That's why I criticize today. There's lots of good people yet, but, today, most the people don't care about the job. It's that *money* that they're after. I was altogether different. My mother told me that whenever you work for anybody you work as if it was your own. And I was very,

very much a trusted employee, everywhere I worked.

*Can you think of any other jobs that you had after you left the fire department? You ran that sawmill. You worked out there on that one electrical line over by Gardnerville or Genoa. Did you do anything else?*

I worked for the ice companies.

*Yes. You told me about that.*

Then I helped get the professional ball club here...the Silver Sox.

*Oh, did you?*

I bought shares in it. I went out and helped Lou Berrum that owned Moana Springs. One of his children is still alive, and his wife, I think, is still alive. I even loaned him some money, and then he hired me to build the ball park, the first professional ball park.

*So you built the ball park out there, the grandstands and all that?*

I was the first to put in the sprinkling system and seeded the park and built everything. I was the first grounds keeper, or whatever you call them, in charge of the whole park. Used to clean the park.

*Did you build the fence and all that, too?*

Yes, everything. Done everything. Helped build the grandstand, and I loaned him some money to help build that whole operation.

*How long were you the grounds keeper?*

Oh, I don't know. Couple of seasons or something.

*Do you remember what year they started out there?*

I don't remember the year. But this is after I left the fire department.

*I wanted to ask you questions about your marriages. You told me you got married 3 times.*

Yes.

*Your first wife was a Devincenzi?*

Yes.

*And how long were you married to the Devincenzi girl?*

Well, we got married in the 1930s—in June of 1930. She died in 1954. We were married 24 years.

*And you didn't have any children?*

No.

*And you lived alone all the time, the 2 of you, or did you have other family members living with you?*

We lived with her family for a while, and then we lived here in Verdi. She died right up here in my mother's house when I was working for Metzker. They came and called me...I was on the job...that my wife had passed away.

*She was a pretty young woman, really, wasn't she, because she was younger than you?*

Yes. She was about 10 years younger than I.

*What happened to her?*

Liquor.

*Oh, that's too bad.*

Here I am, never was anything like that. Liquor to me was poison! I lost my younger brother. He died from liquor. High-class living. That's what they call it. I think it's low-class. I haven't had any liquor in my body for 20 years. Don't smoke; don't eat no sweets.

*You don't drink wine, either?*

No. Once in a while I take a little candy, something sweet. But I don't use no sugar in my coffee.

*When you were younger, though, you probably drank wine, didn't you, because you said your dad made wine and all that?*

Yes, Dad used to make us drink the wine. But my sisters never drank the wine. Isn't that funny?

*Just the boys.*

Two of my sisters, they wouldn't touch it. My father would try to make them drink that wine—at least a little glass— with the food, because Italian food was very rich food. My dad was trained that way. That's what wine was for.

And smoke killed lots of people. Smoke killed my brother, George, next to me. They operated on him; his lungs were completely gone. Of course, the sawmill sawdust didn't help it, either.

*Yes, I'm sure. I had an uncle who died. He smoked, but he also was a miner and he had that silicosis, little pieces of quartz in there. Just cut his lungs all up. It's like emphysema*

Just like the teamsters, years ago. The teamsters with lots of dust; you inhaled so much. That's what a lot of teamsters died from—heavy dust.

*The question that I wanted to ask you was, after you left the fire department, when did you decide to move up here to Verdi, again? You were still with your first wife at that time, and you said you moved back up here to Verdi, and you were living here in Verdi when your first wife died. Why did you decide to leave Reno and come back up to Verdi?*

Well, we sold the house over on Burns Street because I thought I'd get my wife to live with some of my people, maybe that they could watch her a little better. She'd do this on the sly, then wouldn't let me know about it. She just lived on liquor. Well, she had that habit before I married her, and I didn't know it.

*Because she was real young when you married her, 21 or something.*

Sure, she was young, but she.... One time I went to the show, to the Wigwam Theater. I was to meet her in front of the Wigwam Theater, and when she walked out of the theater, she had to vomit. And she didn't show it. The girl was sneaking liquor from her family. I didn't know it. No, I didn't until one day I found some empty whiskey bottles.

*Then you knew what was happening?*

Yes. And I tried to get her to...too bad, boy. She was the best...gosh...now, she was a

beautiful woman. Then her mother died in my arms—heart attack. I tried everything and couldn't do nothing; she had a bad heart for a long time. And then her father died, and then we ended up with her youngest sister.

*Living with you?*

Yes.

*That was in Reno?*

Well, even here.

*Oh, the youngest sister moved back up here, too?*

Yes. We had her in a school down in Nevada City; there's a school for orphans down there. Well, she wouldn't stay there. She passed away. I took care of her for a long time.

*Well, after your wife died, how long were you single? How long were you unmarried?*

Oh, I was single for 10 years. Then I married a widow from Oakland. Her daughter married Leo Birch from Sparks. She's retired now. She was the head of that federal organization for the poor people down on Sutro Street.

*The daughter?*

Yes. She was a very brilliant woman. Then she died here; died in bed.

*Your second wife?*

Yes.

*How did you meet her if she was from Oakland?*

She was living here with her daughter, and she was a widow. That's how I met her.

*What was her maiden name?*

Oh...

*Tough question, yes? [laughter]*

See, I'm getting so I forget things.

*Yes. Was she Italian?*

No, she was German.

*How long were you married the second time?*

Not very long. I don't even remember that. I don't know—3, 4 years, something like that.

*Did you live right here in Verdi the whole time?*

Yes.

*Were you working at the time, during that second marriage?*

Yes, I was. I had that job of checking for Metzker.

*Then you had that job a long time, because you said your first wife died when you were out with Metzker.*

Well, I was working at the sawmill, then.

*Oh, you were working at the sawmill for Metzker down there by the River Inn when your first wife died?*

Yes. And the other one I was....

*Going around and being an overseer?*



Yes. Before I married her, she even drove over the back way to Loyalton to see me. I was up there working for Metzker then.

*How long were you single after your second wife died?*

Oh, I was single 3 or 4 years. Not too long. Then this woman here, she was from Wisconsin. She was working for Sears Roebuck Company.

*Where? In Reno?*

Yes. She was brought out here, and she was a widow. I met her, and she loved these mountains, and she could talk about these mountains. So, "Well," I said, "I need a good housekeeper.

*[laughter]*

So I married her. Then she wanted to move down to California someplace, and I said, "No." I said, "Not me. You want to move, OK. I'll divorce you." So I did. I divorced her right now.

*And she went down to California? [laughter]*

Yes. Then she came back up here afterwards and moved out to Sun Valley. And that man that she was living with...he is a retired man from Oakland. He was here not too long ago; he's a good friend of mine. Nice fellow. And she died while she was with him. She died from cancer. And me never—very seldom—ever touched liquor. But they used to. My first wife used to; she was traveling with the high-class women of Reno.

I happened to know. ..and excuse my expression...but some high-class women that are drunkards. Behind the scene. They keep

the house locked up. No good! There's a lot of that going on. Lots of it. More than what people know of.

*But it goes on?*

I used to get called on lots of hurry-up calls.

*You mean when you were in the fire department?*

Yes. A country boy got his eyes opened up of what people do. Yes, I did. You'd be surprised what I have seen in life.

*The fire department is a front-line job. You see a lot there—suicides and all that.*

Get called on everything. Listen here...I used this expression. I was a great teacher with the limited schooling that I had, but I was a great teacher of the ways of life. I used to talk to the schools in Reno. I used to talk to the clubs, to the people. Instruct people and all that. And we belong to the animal family; we're warm blooded. That's what I was instructed—that we belong to the animal family. And we do. But they call us human beings. And we are worse than the so-called animals. Animals don't do things that us human beings do in life; An animal has to fight to survive. Something attacks him, they have to fight. He kills to survive; he has to. Right?

Yes.

We kill to survive; we kill hundreds of thousands so-called steers, a year. Sheep, hogs, chickens, pigeons. Everything. Rabbits. To survive, we kill. But we also kill for greed and power.

*And even pleasure.*



Animals don't do that, for greed and power. No, they don't. See? See what I learned in my life? And I'm learning, yet. Then, just like me in the fire department. There was certain jealousy towards me because I was called to do this, I was called to do that. I was called for everything. And then it got to be jealousy. Why would they be jealous of me? See, the head of the department, if he'd have been a smart man, he should have been proud to have people like me in his department.

*That's for sure.*

Wouldn't you feel like that?

*Absolutely.*

But, as I said, he was jealous of me because I had too much notoriety, too much whatever you want to call it. I didn't want that job, because you know what I told the councilmen and the mayor?

*No, what'd you tell them?*

I said, "I wouldn't have this job. I wouldn't work under you, Mr. Mayor. No." And I told the councilmen that, too. I was afraid of nobody. Because I was not afraid of losing that job. No, I wasn't, because I worked with a pick and a shovel before I *ever* went in that department. I knew what it was to work for 15¢ an hour! In the summertime from 6:00 to 6:00. I went through it; I seen it. I worked for the power company cleaning the ditches before they had machines to clean the ditches. You *walked* from here way down there and way up there with a pick and a shovel on your back and your lunch. I worked in the sawmill over there for 15 hours a day during the war. I was in Wadsworth when I became 18 years old.

*Well, Joe, we've talked about a lot of things. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?*

Did I tell you about the first postmaster over in Crystal Peak? I got to tell this to the school class. I got to take them up this next Tuesday for I don't know how many miles, but where the original Donner Party went through.

*Oh, yes?*

Yes. The first postmaster was Franklin Buell. It's in July of 1864. That's when he was the first postmaster at Crystal Peak. Then the name was changed to Verdi; they moved here 30 November 1869. The railroad went through in 1868.

*You've mentioned a marble works here in Verdi, Joe. Tell me about that.*

All right. This side of Flash power plant, about, oh, 3 miles up the track, there was a big marble works there when I was a young fellow. It closed down. My youngest brother's house was moved here from up there. It was the main office.

*Do you remember what the marble works was called?*

No, I don't. I was there when all the machinery was still there and the watchman was Mr. Smith. He's buried over here at the cemetery. He lived in that house there. He used to have a little white horse and a little buckboard, and he'd come to Verdi to get his groceries, and us kids used to ride up then and walk back.

*Do you remember when it was still working? Did you go there when it was functioning?*

No. I didn't. I remember it was working when I first came here. I think maybe worked one season or one year. The train.. there was a switch and they'd switch mostly flatcars.... This marble, they tell me, came from out in Lee Vining [California], in that country. Is there marble...?

*Yes, there could be. They'd bring it all the way from there?*

On railroad, to Verdi, to there....

*Did they cut it, or sculpt it, at this marble works?*

Yes. Cut it and shine it and polish it and all that. They cut it in little squares and....

*Did any of the Italian guys around here work at that marble works?*

Not that I know of.

*In Italy there's a lot of marble works. I was just wondering if any of the men that knew anything about that came here to Verdi?*

Oh, not that I remember any of them working there.

And then did I tell you about the flume down Dog Creek?

*I don't think so.*

They had a flume that started just as the canyon started, this end of Dog Valley. Part of the dam is still there. They dammed up the creek. Then they had a flume all the way clean down here to where them 2 factories are—you know where I mean?

*Oh, yes. Right here in Verdi. It brought the water right across the river?*

Across the river. Flume all the way from up there. That's how they used to transport the lumber. There was 3 sawmills. There was the Revert mill, Buell mill, something like that. They owned a big bunch of timber up there, too. Then there was that other little mill over there. There was 3 sawmills in Dog Valley.

A good, long time they hauled it down with the steam wagons. But because then they used to have teams, they had the fellow ride ahead on horseback. I remember, I got a picture of it someplace. They're hauling the boiler over to the Revert mill. Anyway, a fellow on horseback used to ride ahead of the steam wagon, ahead of the big teams, 10, 12, 14 head of horses. When he'd come to the steam wagon, he'd make the steam wagon park because that moveable thing scared all the horses.

Horses are scared to death of anything that moves. Nowadays, they're not, but I remember the time when the horse was scared to death of that black thing—everything's painted black—that moving thing.

I remember the [Jim] Jeffries and [Jack] Johnson fight, Fourth of July, 1910, down by Coney Island [an amusement park between Sparks and Reno]. I remember when they went by here we waved; everybody was out there. Jeffries went by; he was San Francisco boy. He went by, out on the observation car. They used to have observation cars on the... the last car of the train.

Yes.

Most of the people was sitting out there waving at everybody. And we were all up here along the track. Mr. Broach notified everybody in the town that the great champion, Jim Jeffries, was coming through on the...what number was it? Or was it a special train? I forget. The fight was with Johnson, the first Negro, 4 July 1910. I was 11 years old.

I remember that park down there we used to call Belle Isle [part of present-day Wingfield Park]. They had some monkeys over there. We had a walking bridge across there.

*They had monkeys on the island?*

Yes.

*They were just loose, or were they in cages?*

In cages. That's the first monkey that I'd seen, I think.

Did I tell you about the lights that was scattered up on these mountains here for the first airplane that carried the mail through here? [The first flight was on 9 September 1920.]

*No. You didn't tell me.*

Monte Mouton was his name—the aviator. He was an aviator in the First World War. There was a light up there on the point of that mountain, there's a light up here, and there was a light up here, on the high peaks. And there was strung wires up there.

*That was so he could see the mountains?*

The directions, I guess. Lights on the hill for the mail plane. Now'd I ever tell you about the coal tunnel on Mortenson ranch, up there close to Boomtown? When the railroad built the second track in 1914, the steam shovels set the coal in the tunnel on fire. They built the roadbed where the old road used to be to Verdi. They filled all of that in and built the railroad bed. That's when they created the South Verdi Road. Do you remember the 2 overpasses over the railroad?

Yes.

All right. Well, that was built in 1914. Do you know that we used to have to drive through smoke there for I don't know how many years?

*Really?*

It was coming from that coal. They'd set that coal on fire.

*It's natural coal?*

Natural coal. I can take you out and show you. There's a little creek running over the coal, and the coal is in flakes. You can put a shovel on there and dig up a flake. And it'll burn. Millions [of] years ago this was...see, what makes coal is vegetation and human matter.

Well, did I tell you about one of our great sheepmen that owned Incline Village? Our Senator Patrick McCarran wanted the county to buy it for a recreation area. Did I tell you that?

*No, you didn't tell me about that.*

You look into that; there's quite a story about that. When the banks closed....

*You mean in the 1930s?*

He wanted the county to buy it for a recreation spot for the Washoe County people. They laughed at him. See what happened? I think we could have got it for what...20 thousand?

*Twenty thousand dollars!*

I don't know.

*You're kidding!*

Why don't you look into it? Owned by Uncle Dan Wheeler, the great sheepman.

*He owned that?*

He owned most of that mountain. That's where he grazed his sheep. Pretty sure he owned all of Incline.

*But the county didn't go for it?*

Oh, hell, no. They didn't want to spend all that money up there.

Did I ever tell you about Bob Williams? They called him the Sand Man. [Bob Williams operated a sand and gravel company.] He shot 2 or 3 attorneys down here in [a Washoe County] courtroom one time. You ever read about [Edwin C.] Mulcahy? Happened 23 November 1960. The attorney, Mulcahy, was wounded and died a few days later. He was Bob's mother-in-law's attorney. Eli Livierato, Bob's wife's attorney, died right in the courtroom, and G. Waldron Snyder, an attorney from Ohio, was wounded but recovered.

Bob Williams, he's a great friend of mine. That's when I was in the fire department. And he [used to tell me,] "I'm going to kill them fellows," he says. See, there was 2 attorneys—they were for him.

*What kind of a case?*

Someone was trying to take the property away from him. He used to come to the fire department—he was a good friend of mine—and he used to come there all the time and talk to us and all that. He married some woman who was here from way back East somewhere—I forget now—and her brother was an attorney back there.

So, anyway, he held some land just this side of Reno a little ways, about from the city

limits maybe a mile, and up there close to where Harrah's was going to build that [auto collection] up on that hillside there. So they started to take that land away from him; that is his wife, I think. Then her brother came out here, and, naturally, he was on the wife's side and was going to take the land from Williams. One of the attorneys was from Sparks, Eli Livierato.

Anyway, they turned against him, his own attorneys. So he shot.. I think he killed 2 of them; I'm not sure. I know one died—killed him right there. He shot 2 and shot also her brother [Snyder].

*Where did he shoot them? Where were they?*

Over at the courthouse. Bob Williams spent the rest of his life up in Carson.

I said, "Bob, you don't want to do that."

Jack Harker, too...the Harker and Harker brothers—the oldest brother; he's dead...he told me, "You know, he told me that he was going to shoot those fellows." By golly, he shot them all right.

*Is there anything else about Verdi you'd like to talk about?*

I never told you about that well-trained horse that used to haul the milk wagon around, delivering here in Verdi.

No.

Well, one of the Jepson boys was a justice of the peace here—Marcus Jepson—then, I guess. [N. E. Jepson ran for, but was not elected, justice of the peace in 1914.] And the other Jepson, what did he get to be? Lieutenant governor of the state? [Vail M. Pittman was elected governor over Melvin E. Jepson in 1946. Oscar D. Jepson was a

member of the Nevada State Assembly, dying while in office in 1959.] Well, anyway, their father had a dairy here. Then, you couldn't go into the store to buy milk. You either had to have a cow yourself or you had the milkman.

Yes.

All right. Well, that horse with a little spring wagon...he had his milk on there...milk cans...and he used to come by every morning. He had his measuring can...they talk about today it's unhealthy and all that. Well, he'd pour that milk in here, and then he'd come up, and you want a quart of milk...well, all right...quart. You'd come out with your pan and [he'd] pour the milk.

This street had a dead end here. Fellow by the name of Nicholas had a pigeon farm there. He had hundreds of pigeons, and he used to sell to the Riverside hotel. The train used to stop; we had a depot here. He shipped them on the train to the Riverside hotel. I don't know how many dozens of squabs— young pigeons.

Anyway, this horse would go down here and to the last house. The horse couldn't turn there; he had to go a little bit further. Then he'd go this way...I'm telling you.. .boy, if I had a picture of that, that'd be worth a lot of money. That horse would go down here like this, turn here like this, and this wheel wouldn't hit the... you turn too sharp it rubs the bed of the....

Yes.

Then the horse would go like this, and the horse would back up, ahead of the wagon...

*Knew how to make a turn-around down there.*

...and stop right here. That horse done it!

*All by itself.*

That's really something. That horse done it so many times.

*Finally knew just how to do it.*

I think it was a mare. Just done it. Soon as he got off, that horse went down, turned like this, cramped the wheels, and backed up.

*Then she'd come back and get him?*

She'd stop right there in front.

*Just waiting for him to come out. [laughter]*

Boy, that's something. That's an animal!

Yes, really.

*You mentioned something about a lone forest ranger. What is that story?*

The first forest ranger...see, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Forest Service in 1906, I think. And the first ranger that we seen here—I can't think of his name— used to ride around on horseback with a pack animal to pack his goods and equipment. He traveled the country on this horse; he had a certain area to travel. Oh, a nice fellow. He wanted to meet everybody, and he was the lone forest ranger.

We had a fire up here about 2 miles into California on 80 [Interstate 801 a couple weeks ago. Some fellow drove off the side of the road up there and set his pickup on fire; I think he stole it and wanted to destroy it. They set the hillside on fire, so the Division of Forestry answers, and we goes up there, too. So, when I go up there, here they are talking on the radio and not fighting the fire. I said, "Hey," I said, "fellows. This is not putting the fire out. That radio is not putting the fire out." Boy, did I raise hell. Oh. "You know," I says,

“we put the fires out; then we can talk on the radio.

I was fighting fires before we had radio! I was in the Reno Fire Department when we had to use the earphone to hear the radio.

Yes, 1929. Oh, I raised hell. And I had to go up, me an old man, had to go up there with the damned hose, and I corralled the fire. I stopped the fire. Lots of politics, yes, my young man.

Yes.

Lots of it. You wouldn't run your business like that if you had a business.

No.

Too bad. This wonderful country of ours. Something's got to happen. Yes. Let me tell you this here. I believe this way, here. You and I have something happen, and we have a disagreement about this and about that, and then we get together, and we work it out ourselves, and you got a lot of money. See? We come to an agreement, and I pay you this or this or whatever it was...settlement. And that attorney over there, he hears about you having a lot of money, so he comes and talks to you.

Yes.

There's where a lot of trouble is in this country today.

*Attorneys?*

Hungry attorney. I could go on and on and on. I've seen so much in life. Troublemakers. I seen a lot of that.

Now here, we goes up there. And I'm like this—I don't have time to change, put my fire

coats on and all this, and I'm up [there] to corral that fire, want to stop it.

Yes.

So here comes U.S. Forest Service, and he's all...big, tall, nice-looking fellow. Big helmet on, and he's got gadgets hanging all over him.

*Going to fight the fire all decorated! [laughter]*

He comes up there and he says to me, walking right by when I got the hose line up there—I had the fire corralled, stopped it from moving—he says to me, “Where's your fire aid equipment? And your helmet?”

I'll bet you that guy's sorry he said that to me because I told him, I says, “I'm up here to corral this fire and there's no danger here. I don't need no helmet; I don't need no fire clothes on. I'm up here to put this fire out. And then, besides that, young man,” I says, “I'm the fire chief here. This is Sierra County. We have a contract with Sierra County, and I'm the fire chief.”

*[laughter]*

I stopped the fire. An 85-year-old man up there stopping the fire. And then the other fellow, the Division of Forestry, he's about halfway down there.. .blab blab blab, that's all he's doing. And the fires's going! Me, I stopped it. I says, “Can't you do the talking *after* the fire's controlled? Then you can tell them what's going on.

*[laughter]*

And it isn't those young menus fault.

*It's the way they're trained, yes.*



They're instructed that that's what they have to do. Now, today, I have the man that sells—Nottingham is his name; he represents an equipment company from Oakland—sells fire equipment and everything. We gotta have a fire shirt, because now the prisoners.... See, then they had 3 crews. They had one crew from the U.S. Forest Service; they spent 20 minutes down there getting ready to fight the fire, harnessing themselves up. Then there was a crew from the Nevada Division of Forestry; they spent all that time down there putting shirts on. They call them fire resistant shirts. *Yellow shirts!* They decorate them so they also got pants. You know how much one of those shirts cost?

No.

Sixty-eight dollars!

*That's a pretty good shirt.*

Yes. Then there was the prisoners. So they had to decorate all of them up, too, because if a prisoner gets burned without the proper clothing on, then he can sue the state of Nevada. Do you know that?

*I didn't know that, no.*

It [would be] forcing a man to go up there without the proper clothing. There's too much of that. No more common sense being used in this country here, this wonderful, beautiful country. *Three* crews down there, and me, a 85'-year-old man up there; I corralled the fire. Then they spend all night out there putting out things that are burned up. Each one of them's got a shovel or a mattock or something. They spent all night up there.

When I was in the fire department in Reno, the old chief— Lee Hawcroft, the

man that they forced to be the chief after his brother got killed—we had the lowest fire loss in the history of Reno. He carried his resignation in his pocket all the time. He used to cry when he come up there before us firemen and tell us what the council wanted to do and didn't want to do and all this and that. He was a thousand percent for the people.

*Do you think things are as good as they used to be?*

No, I don't.

*How do you think they've changed, Joe?*

A man that works for wages today, who'd like to have a home for his family, he can't do it.

*No. Interest rates and all that are way too much.*

That's not right.

*Well, it's not right, but I don't know what you do about it. The prices of houses....*

Well, when I was a young man, pretty near everybody that came here from the old country—especially the old country people—that's why they came here, to own a piece of land and to build a house on it and to own a home.

*And they could do that pretty easily?*

Yes.

*Didn't take them very long.*

No.

*Why was that true?*

And if they had their home paid for, and they had \$5,000 in the bank for savings... you know how much we were getting then to loan money? Three percent! We were getting 3 percent 70, 80 years ago! They had their money loaned out at 3 percent. That was the cheapest. Everybody talked about 3 percent. ..they would retire.

*With a house and \$5,000 you could retire?*

Because instead of having that lawn out there, do you know what they'd have out there? Something to eat.

*Vegetable garden?*

Yes. Absolutely! Grass—you got to water it; then you got to buy a mowing machine, and then you got to throw it away.

*Yes, right! [laughter] Would they have chickens and stuff like that, too?*

Yes, and rabbits right out in the backyard here.

*Right here in town.*

Yes, sir! Then if they had a piece where they could pasture that cow, that's what they had—a cow. And that cow— you better not hurt that cow! Because they lived off that cow.

*Have you noticed any other changes?*

Well, people have not the love of one another that they had years ago. Years ago, everybody tried to help one another. Oh, we had different thinking people then, too, naturally. But we thought more of our community. We had more interest in our community, in our country, than we have

today. You hear them today, "Oh, I don't care; it don't belong to me." See, that's the story that you get today. It does, too; everything here belongs to us. Those trees up on that hill over there? That's California.

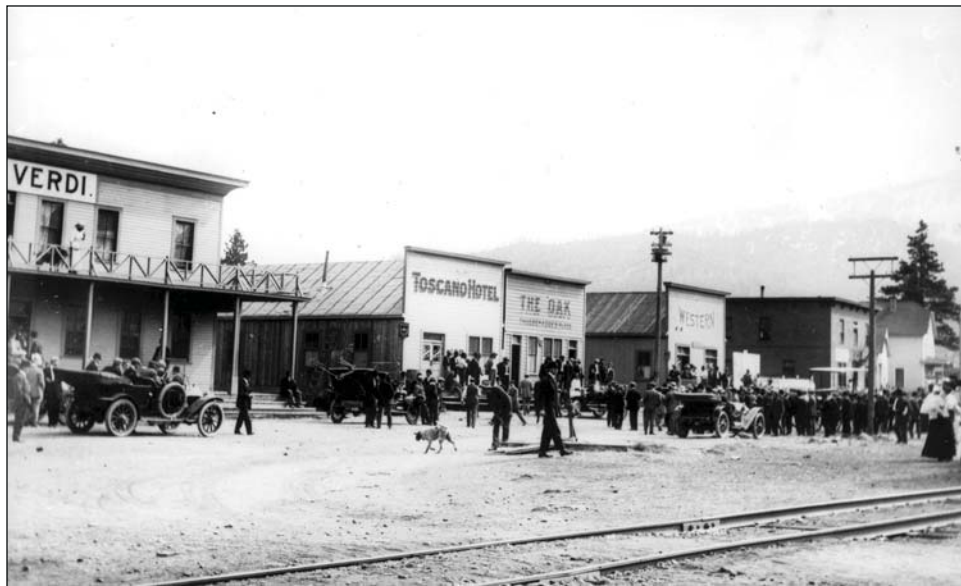
Yes.

I've heard many of them, and many right today, "Oh, hell, that don't belong to us; it belongs to California." Get that idea? Did they learn that in school? Things shouldn't be that way.

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

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Verdi, 1912

(Courtesy of University of Nevada, Reno Library,  
Special Collections Department, Judy Dickinson Collection.  
Photo by Martin Mortensen)



Built in the 1860s, the Merrill House was once a stage shop. When this photo was taken in 1916, it was owned by the Verdi Lumber Co.  
In 1986, it is known as the Donner Trail Ranch.



Highland Ditch Crew at Highland Ditch Tunnel, 1919.  
Standing, l. to r.: George Mosconi, Bert Mosconi, Steve Stefani, John Bava Sr., Joe Zunino.  
Sitting, l. to r.: Walter Philips, Geno Mantelatice, John Harker.





Boney-Jackman Sawmill at the first summit on the old Dog Valley Road, 1921.  
Bill Koskella, left; Henry Hunken, right.



Joe Mosconi in the 1930s.



Joe Mosconi and his niece, Barbara Ting, aboard an American-La France fire engine, dressed for Bicentennial celebration, 1976.

(Photograph by University of Nevada Oral History Program)



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